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The new dramatic play
reflections of practice, process, theory

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The New Dramatic Play:
Reflections of Practice, Process, Theory

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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into the new dramatic play, a term coined as an alternative to the way that written drama is framed up in Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic theatre. It is a practice-led research which evolves around my own play, *Lucas and Time*, taking on its creative processes, such as improvisation, and transforming them into research tools and methods. The thesis argues that the new dramatic play is a theatre text that denies a teleological relationship with the stage and reclaims a sense of completion, without presenting itself as a fixed entity. The thesis, which unfolds as a thinking-through-writing, proposes a sense of theatricality related to the mechanism of the 'inner spectator', investigates the play's difference from other kinds of written texts, and suggests that the new dramatic play engages with tragedy in order to understand its own predicament and search for acts of resistance, which ultimately are to be located in a suspension of ethics. The thesis also discusses other works, such as Heiner Müller's *Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man,* which creates a space for ambiguity and contradiction that forces the spectator to take a stand, and Tim Crouch's *The Author,* which attempts to regulate the spectators' responses, with unforeseen outcomes. It also presents an experiment, as an account of the events around the production of *Lucas and Time* in Stadttheater Osnabrück, which premiered in August 2016. Finally, the thesis discusses the relationship between the play, the thesis and the writer as a movement that involves both the present and the future, in the form of an implicit 'And so on'.

Contents

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Prolegomenon

What follows is an exploration of the new dramatic play; I employ this term to denote

a body of work whose mode of thinking, language and form renewed dramatic writing through the reworking of the dramatic conventions and showed that, far from being texts to be used in theatre as linguistic material, they are texts written as theatre which ask for the relationship between play and stage to be rethought. These plays evolved during the latter decades of the twentieth century; in this thesis, I make references – sometimes passing, often lengthy – to the work of Heiner Müller, Martin Crimp, Elfriede Jelinek, Harold Pinter, Sarah Kane, Samuel Beckett, Tim Crouch, Caryl Churchill and Peter Handke.

I discuss the new dramatic play neither as a composite of traits nor in terms of a normative poetics. Rather, I focus on the play's 'constellation of gestures', to use a phrase from Giorgio Agamben's short essay (1999:77) on the German critic Max Kommerell in which he reminds us that what we call politics is nothing but the sphere of the full, absolute gesturality of human beings. These gestures show the new dramatic play as an autonomous theatre text whose sense of completion does not efface its internal conflicts nor limit its potentialities but, instead, renders them visible; a text whose content is inseparable from its form and whose rules and logic are produced internally; a text that glances ironically at its own future stagings, refusing to consider them its fulfilment; a text that is aware of its own theatricality and differentiates itself from any other type of written text.

But a ground of conflict has already been marked. Plays of the aforementioned writers – with the exception of Pinter – have often been labelled postdramatic; scholars such as Karen Jürs-Munby, Gerda Poschmann and David Barnett all argue that these plays (Crimp's *Attempts on*

Her Life, Sarah Kane's *Crave*, Müller's *Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man* and *Hamletmachine*, Jelinek's "Sprachflächen" plays) nullify dramatic conventions such as plot and character, un-structure time and thus effectively move beyond representation, marking a new territory for theatre writing that is no longer dramatic. The postdramatic theory's suggested binary between text-based (dramatic) theatre and non-text-based (postdramatic) theatre is not necessarily about the abolishment of the pre-written text but of its claim for primacy so that its power, granted to it by the dramatic theatre, will be redistributed. By having its primacy relinquished in favour of theatrical means beyond language, the power gets redistributed among spectators who become co-authors of the work.

This thesis takes issue with the strategies utilised to subvert the primacy of the play by postdramatic theory, following the poststructuralist discourse's rejection of the concept of originary authority and adopting its claim of radical potential which demands the shift of authority from the author to the reader (Tomlin, 2013:60). To start with, postdramatic theory offers no distinction between plays and devised texts (by performance theatre collectives such as Rimini Protokoll and Forced Entertainment). Although pre-written, the devised text is not self-sufficient but tied to the specific show for which it is created and holds a limited role in the theatrical event, all the more because it is not considered its origin. By casually swapping between the two in its argumentation, the postdramatic theory handles the play as equal to a mouldable text-material for the stage.

'In postdramatic theatre', writes Lehmann, 'breath, rhythm and the present actuality of the body's visceral presence take precedence over the logos' (2006:145). In Lehmann's thought, the play's concerns with embodiment and even its sense of theatricality itself is erased; instead, it is regarded as primarily a literary construct. In this way, the postdramatic theory manages the problem of primacy posed by these plays' strong authorial voice: as if their theatrical elements cannot be considered outside their stagings and the directorial concepts of those stagings. However, the theorists of the postdramatic remain unclear about whether the charge of theocratic authorship identified by Jacques Derrida now inevitably passes on to

the director. For, as Philip Auslander points out, 'the theatre remains theological as long as it is logocentric, and the logos of the performance need not to take the form of a playwright's or creator's text, but also the director's concept or the actor's self' (2002:29).

Lastly, by claiming that these plays effectively part with the Aristotelian dramatic model, the postdramatic theory seeks not only to cut ties with a certain vocabulary which proclaims that the play is essentially a theatrical text but also, more importantly, to connect them ideologically with the claims of radicalism that the postdramatic theory appropriated from previous avant-gardes. The radical claim has always been 'to subvert the established order of things' (Schechner, 2006:141). The theorists of the postdramatic argue that the historical dominance of drama is evidence of its bind to the Western history of logocentric authority and, as Tomlin explains, 'central to this analysis is an understanding of the dramatic theatre form as a representational practice that strives to replicate an external reality' (2013:45). It comes as no surprise that these plays, often discussed as a composite of deviant structures, supposedly subvert hierarchical relationships and challenge our established notions of reality, setting us free from the constraints of Logic.

My research focuses on the differences between plays,[1] devised texts and literary texts that are used in theatre, to show how the new dramatic play performs as a theatre-machine, built on a variety of theatrical mechanisms and structures. I discuss how meaning in the new dramatic play is produced not by the textual material alone but by the coming together of two realities, the page and the stage, which are both present in the process of writing, and which, through the tensions, constraints as well as possibilities they create for one another, generate the theatrical universe we call a play, and show that this arrangement takes place through a mechanism I call "inner spectator". I discuss how it responds to, challenges, assimilates and embodies new developments on the contemporary theatre stage, such as new formations of stage/audience relations and new actorly practices. Furthermore, I argue that the plays I

[1] By "play" I mean a dramatic work written for the stage in its printed form: I emphasise the way a play is constructed on the page – what Worthen refers to as 'mise-en-page' in *Print and Poetics of Modern*

discuss in this thesis do not reside in some land “beyond drama”, but, on the contrary, owe their innovations to their reworking of dramatic conventions, forming new dynamic compositions.

Contrary to the idea that the play is always in a “state of becoming” (as argued by Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, among others) or “unfinished” (as suggested by poststructuralist thinkers such as Bernard Dort) and can only be fulfilled on stage (as claimed by the postdramatic theatre), which all imply a linear and in fact teleological relationship between play and stage, this thesis defends the view that the difference between page and stage is ‘one of kind, not degree’ (Hartley, 2005:42). The thesis is sympathetic rather with writers such as Alexander Karschnia, who uses the term “theatextrality” (from the combination of the terms “textuality” and “theatricality”) as most capable to express the dual nature of the play. As Karschnia argues, ‘the theatre of the text opens up a process in which text and performance are not taken to be a functional couple but are seen as one already inscribed in the other’ (2009:310).

Postdramatic theory claims a subversion of the established order of things, on grounds that, contrary to the dramatic theatre, whose representational strategies replicate the dominant ideological fictions of the real, it is capable of radical impact exactly because it evades the charge of mimesis by its present-time immediacy. This claim has been proven to be problematic by many scholars, for example Liz Tomlin, who shows that, if we follow Derrida’s full argument, we will have to conclude that ‘any notion of “present-ness” within a performance aesthetic is always already a representation of “being-present” rather than “the thing itself”’ (2013:74). Similarly, in her recent book *Writing and the Modern Stage: Theater beyond Drama*, Julia Jarcho observes that ‘to totalize this aspect of performance’s presentness is to ignore the historical weight we invoke when we speak of “the present”, its reference to what is; what testifies to having been perpetrated; what we are tolerating and perpetuating’ (2017:7). Jarcho (who writes in defence of a ‘theatre of writing’) argues that theatre, by making this burden of actuality palpable, can in fact ‘prompt the search for

actuality's opposite: that which is not here or now, that which would be radically different' (ibid.).

In this thesis, I focus on Lehmann's claim of radical impact specifically in relation to plays: according to Lehmann, it is due to their "radical" forms and structures that the new dramatic plays (which he considers to be postdramatic) manage to make us understand the world in different ways. However, I argue that these radical structures and forms, such as impossible temporalities, language that causes somatic effects, reversed causation, all common in postmodernist narratives, are in fact already known to us, mostly from fairytales as well as fantasy and science-fiction genres, and have thus already been conventionalised, namely 'turned into basic cognitive categories' (Fludernik, 1996:256). My argument, therefore, is that the new dramatic play's value is not in that it necessarily proposes "new thinking", as Lehmann suggests, following the rhetoric of the "subversion of the established order of things" of the various avant-gardes, but rather in that it proposes a new political and ethical positioning in relation to the stage and the audience.

I use the term "new dramatic play" for I understand it as the continuation of drama, with its long history of births and rebirths, innovations and dead-ends, aspirations and crises. To reclaim the original meaning of drama as action (from the Greek verb δραν which means to act, to perform) is to recognise that action is already in the act of writing, as a politics of writing; action is the language that creates the world of the play which, with its tools and mechanisms, its improvisations, its mode of thinking, requires work to be understood – and, as Joshua Landy observes, 'a kind of work that – unlike mere interpretation – nobody else can do in our stead' (2012:53). And so, the adjective "new" points not only to the ways the new dramatic play reworks dramatic conventions and places action as language at its centre, but also to its acts of resistance, to its stubborn holding on to its particularity and its otherness, in its clash against the conditions of production within the institution of theatre, and also against theory's programmatic speech that aims to define beforehand its role and its value, and thus regulate its relationship with the stage and the audience.

The new dramatic play looks back at its roots, the Greek tragedy, where the original conflict between the individual and the collective takes place, to study its forms and architectures (which include novelisation, characters as narrators, musicality as expressed through rhythm, repetitions or variations, a strong sense of theatricality, a language that seeks not only to persuade but also to expose its inability to communicate) in order to enunciate its sense of the "tragic", namely its conflict with the collective medium we call theatre. I propose a notion of the "tragic" that is less aesthetic and more political and philosophical: the new dramatic play's attempt to openly face – just like the Greek tragedy's "tragic hero" – the possibility of its own annihilation. (This notion of the tragic is, I believe, close to the spirit of Cornelius Castoriadis' take on the Greek tragedy in his posthumous publication *Ce qui fait la Grèce,* 2004). And thus, even if the play positions itself as the originary source for meanings, this does not make it theological, for the play does not resolve the conflict. Instead, it exposes the conflict – and it puts forward a gesture of friendship.

Building on Alexander Nehamas' notion of friendship, which suggests that we love our friends not necessarily for their virtues but 'for themselves', I see the play's gesture of friendship as a movement that exhibits itself in the public realm and proposes not an incidental relationship with the stage and the audience but a being with, not as an encounter with an impersonal Other but, as Nehamas puts it, as an 'irreducible experience between two souls' (2016:32); an experience that takes time to manifest itself and includes an imagining into the future. This gesture of friendship does not emanate from the rhetoric of the 'aesthetic of responsibility', which sees the relationship between work and spectator in terms of an ethical contribution, as Nicholas Ridout points out in *Theatre & Ethics* (2009): on the contrary, it rinses off the question of ethics. The new dramatic play suggests a relationship with the stage and the audience that is not already regulated, as in the postdramatic theory, but works on the suspension of ethics: and this, I believe, is the new dramatic play's radical suggestion.

If this thesis considers the new dramatic play through its gestures, it is also necessary to speak about the gestures that engender the method and the writing mode of the thesis itself;

for this is an investigation that takes place as a non-linear, reflexive inquiry which originates from my own practice as a playwright and includes various kinds of knowledge, as well as a mixture of languages, proclivities, and deliberate (and sometimes unintended) connections.

When I started this research, I had little idea about how to bring in creative practice in order to broaden the research's methodological landscape and allow for knowledge that is not necessarily available through traditional forms of inquiry. The idea behind seeking to develop a practice-as-research methodology was that a creative study that would include the processes that led to the finished play – instead of examining it as a product whose creative operations have been rendered irrelevant – could ignite alternative ways of exploring it.

My research project started taking shape after I participated in a conference entitled *Collaboration, Hybridity, Contestation* at Roehampton University, which was dedicated to issues of practice-led research. My presentation comprised the rehearsed reading of a part of a play I had finished writing a few months earlier, *Lucas and Time*, followed by a short essay on the play. However, during the presentation, I became increasingly aware of the fact that the essay did not communicate with the form and language of the play: the play's language (fragmented, dispersed in various voices, engaged in the making and unmaking of a fiction which was delivered as an improvised performance) suggested to the reader/spectator that conventional pathways to meaning-making did not suffice, or should not be entirely trusted, and that new ones had to be invented. And if the play was indeed the primary site for investigation, then its gestures should be allowed to contaminate the research as well.

Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson note that creative approaches to research practices in many ways challenge outmoded perceptions about how we capture, codify and categorise knowledge and they argue, in response to academic scepticism over the value of practice within academia, that 'intuitive messiness and aesthetic ambiguity are integral to researching theatre and performance, where relationships between the researcher and the researched are often fluid, improvised and responsive' (2011:2). The tension between theory and practice stems from the position that knowing is a matter of thinking rather than doing, and thus practice is not epistemic in nature. Ben Spatz observes that not all practice constitutes knowledge, given that the practitioner's ability or experience is not necessarily transmissible, and argues that 'if the goal is to radically change the way we think about knowledge, then theorists of practice and performance must ask and be ready to answer fundamental questions about the embodiment of knowledge' (2015:24).

In this thesis I take on Spatz's epistemologically rigorous concept of technique as knowledge, as one that allows us to conceive the field of embodied practice as fundamentally epistemic. The term "embodied practice" denotes a set of actions; it is not limited to activities of the body but includes 'thought, mind, brain, intellect, rationality, speech, language' (Spatz, 2015:11). According to Spatz, the search for transmissible knowledge through technique is not unlike Robin Nelson's demand for a rigorous practice-as-research which includes 'what can be gleaned through an informed reflexivity about the process of making and its modes of knowing', focusing on critical reflection as a 'pausing, standing back and thinking about what you are doing', namely knowing 'what works' and 'teasing out the methods by which what works is achieved and the compositional principles involved' (cited in Spatz, 2015:231).

Building on the above ideas, and following Derrida, who insists that we must begin 'wherever we are: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be' (1997:162), I developed the thesis as stretching out from my play *Lucas and Time*, taking on the play's creative processes and mechanisms and turning them into research tools and methods. The thesis thus evolves around a technique of improvisation, mirroring the main device of the play, in layers rather

than chapters (the reader will find that seeds left in one layer are to be picked up in the next), which may work together or occasionally overlap, or even pull in different directions. The reader – sometimes explicitly placed in the text as a character stolen from Umberto Eco's *Confessions of a Young Novelist,* identified as Eco's thesis's examiner – will find that the research proceeds also through impulses, accidents, experiments and patterns borrowed from the play, such as the making of lists, or the stealing of a character from someone else's work (the name Lucas is stolen from Ted Hughes' poem *Visit*). And all of these processes give shape to a way of thinking about the new dramatic play that is not fixed but rather has to do with responsiveness, relationality, time, recognition, and a being with as a movement that takes time to manifest itself and includes an imagining into the future.

And so I use improvisation, which I understand as defined by Paul Berliner, as a technique that 'involves reworking pre-composed material and designs in relation to unanticipated ideas conceived, shaped, and transformed under the special conditions of performance, thereby adding unique features to every creation' (1994:241) to bring the creative and the critical elements together, in configurations that are sometimes more suggestive than conclusive (not unlike the narrative configurations of *Lucas and Time),* for through improvisation I let unpredictability in, which, in Judith Butler's words, 'is the opportunity for difference to enter the system' (cited in Siddall and Waterman, 2010:24). My engagement with improvisation follows Butler's view that 'improvisation can be understood as a space of "allowing", a type of openness that acknowledges an unknowingness' (ibid.). Diana Goldman's definition of improvisation as 'a rigorous mode of making oneself ready for a range of potential situations', and as an 'incessant preparation, grounded in the present while open to the next moment's possible actions and constraints' (cited in Siddall and Waterman, 2010:4) is also suited to my research, which begins without fixed definitions and proposes a thinking-through-writing technique.

I draw on theories from theatre, philosophy, literary criticism, performance studies, cultural studies, history, narratology. I bring in other writers, other plays: I focus on Heiner Müller's

Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man. I discuss Tim Crouch's *The Author* and Harold Pinter's *Old Times*. I set Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* against its staging by Katie Mitchell. I return to Sophocles, through Müller, and to Aeschylus, especially in relation to *The Persians*. I walk through various definitional territories. I make unexpected alliances. In the opening pages of *A Lover's Discourse, Fragments*, Barthes notes that his references, from books and from friends, are not authoritative but amical: 'I'm not invoking guarantees, merely recalling, by a kind of salute given in passing, what has seduced, convinced, or what has momentarily given the delight of understanding…' (1978:9). I observe the emerging architectures, not least because they put forward questions about how things connect, and about what the gravitational effect of these connections may be on the things themselves.

Turning the processes of the play into research methods also means developing a mode of writing that can accommodate these metamorphoses and make this project's gestures (its dynamic exchange with the artistic work from which it originates, its amical connections, its urge to be, at times, an intervention into the conventions of academic writing) visible. The thesis' basic textual method is an open, fluid, reflective prose which occasionally works as a laboratory for experiments: for example, I include a published academic article (on Tim Crouch's *The Author*), raising questions about provisionality, deliberation, fixity. The prose of the thesis is often elliptical, asymmetric; the intention is to allow for "gaps" in order to accommodate the unthought. Heidegger suggests that the unthought, being 'not a lack inherent in the thinker's thought but an idiom of original thinking, is the most precious gift that a thinking has to convey' (1968:76).

The thesis' prose, then, is performative writing, in the sense that it makes use of various languages and tones, and mixes creative and critical impulses. According to Della Pollock, performative writing is not a genre or a fixed form since 'holding performative writing to set shapes and meanings would be (1) to undermine its analytic flexibility, and (2) to betray the possibilities of performativity with the limitations of referentiality' (1998:75). Rather, it is writing

that is evocative and ‘favours the interplay between reader and writer in the joint production of meaning’ without claiming to describe ‘an objectively verifiable event or process’ (ibid.:80).

The writing mode of this thesis could also be described as “creative critical writing” or “experimental critical writing”, terms used by various scholars, including Stephen Benson and Clare Connors in the volume *Creative Criticism* (2014), or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *The Ends of Performance* (1998), to denote a type of writing that explores boundaries between genres and negotiates between critical and creative elements. (Or, perhaps, it could be called ‘to-be-in-the-process of writing or drawing’: this is a phrase Benson and Connors use (2014:103) to describe Helene Cixous’ piece *Without end, no, State of drawingness, no, rather: The Executioner’s taking off*, in which she speaks about drawings, sketches, notebooks, the making of writing, the flux of words from which finished works originate. While different in style, I share with Cixous’ writing a desire to hold on to the element of earliness, in both play and thesis, expressed through a prose that, despite its rewrites, accommodates sketchiness and moves through trial and error.)

Returning to writing as a laboratory of experiments: I discuss the production of *Lucas and Time* in Stadttheater Osnabrück that premiered in August 2016. This account, which can be considered a forensic response to circumstance, is given as a live commentary, or as a performance act that unfolds in present time. I let this narration be occasionally infected by a tone of irony, in agreement with Hayden White who perceives irony as objectivity, arguing that ‘the linguistic mode of the ironic consciousness reflects a doubt in the capacity of language itself to render adequately what perception gives and thought constructs about the nature of reality’ (cited in Domanska, 1998:178). For, as White insists, no reflection or representation of an event ‘will ever be considered as comprehensive, exhaustive and satisfactory. Every articulation is susceptible to the permanent possibility of contradiction, correction and amendment’ (cited in Kissack, 1997:226). As Graeme Sullivan observes, the value of utilising the languages and modes of artistic practice in research is also ‘to disrupt untenable dichotomies such as the fictive subjective-objective divide’ (2006:31). Besides, the

performative writing of the thesis itself allows for the use of irony: if I enforce an objective tone to my narration of this event, then the performative element of this narration, which includes the emotion that the act of narration creates to the narrator, will be erased.

In presenting some of the ways in which my technique and mode of thinking as a practitioner, in relation specifically to my play *Lucas and Time*, generated this research's force and gestures, and formulated a certain way of looking into the new dramatic play, I speak about the process of thinking-through-writing: for the play developed not by following an already existing design but as it went along, and the same principle is also true for the thesis. This approach, however, makes certain demands, not least that it expects the reader to engage with the thesis without guidance, not necessarily knowing at every step where they are going, and often having to move back and forth. Laying out the theoretical framework and main arguments, and explaining the methods of this research beforehand, which is a standard academic requirement, in fact clashes with the spirit of the project, which, exactly as the play itself, asks for a "being with" that requires time and includes a process of imagining and a gesture of friendship, as participation for the production of meaning. All things considered, I believe that unveiling the clash by juxtaposing these two distinct ways of thinking about research is a way to disrupt traditional notions of it, which is, after all, the claim that practice-as-research makes.

1.
Readers, Spectators

The essay was produced during my research and is included in the volume *Aesthetics and Ideology in Contemporary Literature and Drama* (Orfanou 2015).[2] I chose to reproduce it in its published form (having adjusted its typography to match the rest of the thesis for issues of consistency), inviting the kind of challenges it poses: as a published text, it implies some sort of immunity to modification, which opposes the provisional nature of the thesis; it vertically cuts through the ongoing thinking-through-writing process of the thesis; it marks a definite point in time. Its juxtaposition with a very different idiom of writing in the rest of this chapter makes the question of reading visible.

"Can we remind you that you're watching a play?"

Tim Crouch's *The Author*

Although direct spectatorial engagement is usually associated with non text-based theatre practices, new dramatic writing has also attempted to find ways to invite and implicate the audience. This essay focuses on *The Author* (2009) by British playwright Tim Crouch, which received a great deal of critical attention due to audience reactions to it. The essay argues that the play develops around strategies of participation, which include the use of a spatial structure that is primarily a place of politics, which overpower the playwright's intended invitation.

[2] An early version of the essay was presented in a conference entitled *Contemporary Literature and Drama* at the University of Avignon, in July 2013. It was organised by Madelena Gonzalez and Rene Agostini, who are also the editors of this volume.

1.

> The audience has been the most problematical element in the modern theatre. Twentieth century practitioners have continually experimented with new ways to involve and relate to audiences: on a physical/sensual level, from Artaud to Grotowski to Schechner; in an intellectual/philosophical framework, from Pirandello to Brecht to Handke.
>
> (Marranca, 1976:59)

The imagining of a new relationship between the work, the artist and the audience has been a key theme for practitioners and theorists alike, and various approaches to audience participation, interaction or co-creation have taken place in theatre and performance, especially during the last sixty years. And while audience participation was always part of traditional and popular forms of theatre, contemporary theatre has raised questions about the role of the audience and about whether a direct exchange with the spectators and their varied responses could revitalize theatre itself and possibly even change our perceptions of what theatre might be in a more urgent way.

In the process of these experimentations, the traditional stage was often replaced by fluid formations in alternative spaces, and emphasis was put on the stimulation of an active spectatorial engagement, which would transform the audience from being passive spectators into emancipated spectators who would stand as creators alongside the artist. This is conceptualized by a number of theatre theorists; Hans-Thies Lehmann amongst them made a riveting case for this in his book *Postdramatic Theatre,* in which he presented a range of theatre practices which, in his opinion, pave the way to audience emancipation. There is theatre “as a social situation”, for instance, practiced by groups such as Rimini Protokoll, which strive to create shows that connect to the culture-at-large by using various media and mixing real life and drama, amateur performers and spectators-as-performers. ‘The theatre turns back to the viewer’, argues Lehmann (2006:107).

However, there have been critical approaches too, which point out that, in these practices, the

involvement of the audience takes place, more often than not, within controlled and pre-determined frameworks, and participation becomes a role-playing with fixed rules and expected outcomes. Helen Freshwater notes that:

> much of what now presents itself as participation in contemporary performance is really nothing of the sort. Performances which seem to be offering audiences the chance to make a creative contribution only give them the choice of option A or option B – or the opportunity to give responses which are clearly scripted by social and cultural convention.
>
> (2011:405-405)

French philosopher Jacques Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator* effectively challenges oppositions such as active versus passive, viewing versus knowing or appearance versus reality, which feed theories such as Lehmann's.

> What makes it possible to pronounce the spectator seated in her place inactive, if not the previously posited radical opposition between the active and the passive? Why identify gaze and passivity, unless on the presupposition that to view means to take pleasure in images and appearances while ignoring the truth behind the image and the reality outside the theatre? Why assimilate listening to passivity, unless through the prejudice that speech is the opposite of action?
>
> (Rancière, 2011:12)

By rejecting such oppositions, Rancière defends the spectator's capacity to draw her own interpretations and meanings as well as to find her place within the world of the spectacle. He reminds us that the spectator can do without the artist's anxious attempts to regulate her experience.

But even if we identify theatre practices that genuinely enhance audience participation, this by itself does not automatically translate to political emancipation or the democratization of art. Besides, audience engagement in the form of participation is not necessarily something the audience is prepared for, as it does entail exposure; that practically means leaving the safety

zone and entering a space where nothing can be taken for granted and where excitement can rapidly change to embarrassment, and vice versa. At the same time, by taking this into account and trying to limit the risks of participation for the audience, theatre-makers run the risk of invalidating the gesture of participation in the first place.

Regardless of these concerns, however, the issue of spectatorial engagement is at the very heart of theatre practice today, with practices and experimentations that aim to enrich our understanding of theatre and broaden the spectrum of the relationship with the audience and what it could possibly be achieved. This is something which is reflected in artistic creation itself in its various forms, one of them being new dramatic writing.

New dramatic writing has attempted to find new and exciting ways to invite and implicate the audience by developing dramaturgies that remove the limitations of the traditional dramatic form, which generally proposed self-contained, inflexible theatrical universes. New dramatic plays have challenged traditional notions of what a play can be and have offered fresh thinking on the relationship with the audience. A good example is the work of Austrian playwright Peter Handke. In his famous play *Offending the Audience,* which was published in 1966, four “speakers” make the audience the subject matter of the play by directly confronting it and attacking, one by one, the conventions, expectations and assumptions of the usual relationship between spectacle and spectator.

A recent play that builds substantially on the relationship with the audience is *The Author* by British playwright and performer Tim Crouch. It was first presented at the Royal Court Theatre (Jerwood Theatre Upstairs) in London in September 2009 and then toured to various theatres in the UK and abroad. The reception was mixed but the negative responses gave it a somewhat notorious reputation due to their extreme nature, especially during its run at the Traverse Theatre, as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2010. The piece attracted a great deal of academic attention, and not without good reason: it is rather extraordinary in that it

allows us to look at the relationship with the audience in rather controversial ways. I saw *The Author* in autumn 2010 at Brighton Theatre, and part of my observations and thoughts in this paper spring out from my own experience as an audience member.

2.

It is no surprise that Handke's *Offending the Audience* is cited as an influence by Tim Crouch for his own play. Similarly to Handke, he proposes the form of the 'Sprechstuck', meaning a spectacle without images but only with words. Crouch reconfigures the stage, having the performers sit amongst the audience; occasionally, members of the audience are directly addressed. At the beginning of the play there is lightness and humor and a friendly atmosphere. But this is soon to change. For in *The Author*, we find a play within a play. Tim Crouch explains:

> One has been written by me, called *The Author* – the one you came to see. The other is an abusive, violent play written by a fictional version of me – a play that is discussed at length in *The Author*, a play that, it is suggested, was recently performed at the Royal Court.
>
> (2011b:417)

This second play contains descriptions of acts of violence, abuse, rape, decapitation, suicide, paedophilia. In the course of *The Author*, we are to find out about the ugly consequences of this play on the writer, performers and an audience member. 'I believe that we must be responsible for what we choose to look at', says Crouch, who describes the play as 'a rallying cry to stop the thoughtless representation of abuse' (2011b:418).

During the show's touring, audience members responded in various ways, from vocalizing their discomfort, walking out or singing, to shouting and physically threatening the performers. Some wrote angry letters in which they accused the playwright of 'betraying' them or exposing them to his 'arrogance' and 'cynicism'. There were explicit objections to the content

of the play – or, more accurately, the play-within-the play and the actions described in it, which they thought of as intolerable and offensive. But there was also resentment in relation to how they felt they were treated as audience. An audience member complained in writing that Crouch and the performers 'were not able to deal with the audience at all….' (Crouch, 2011b:416-420). Others were angered because they felt shut out from the play, or manipulated by the cleverness of it, or by not having their comments during the show answered by Tim Crouch and the performers. Clearly it wasn't only the content of the play that outraged audience members, but also the way they were implicated as audience, and this second aspect is where the critical attention has been focused.

The Author initially invites verbal audience participation, in a conversational form, but as the play continues, these invitations become a rather abrupt questioning ("YOU FUCKING SAY SOMETHING!!!") which naturally is left unanswered by the audience. Other questions follow later on, such as "Is this okay?" and "Is it okay if I carry on?" These questions are often repeated and thus seem to invite a response, although in the event of a response, this will be left unanswered by the performers.

Helen Freshwater comments that:

> the trouble for audiences in *The Author* is that the piece plays with and confounds our desire to 'play along'…. It also sends out conflicting signals about the kind of participation that is appropriate, and the roles audience members should be adopting within the show.
>
> (2011:408)

Liz Tomlin argues that if the audience is asked to respond at certain points, there is an argument to say that the performers should respond to whatever happens in that live relationship, whereas Carole-Anne Upton questions the possibility of an equal relationship with the audience when the text is predetermined (Bottoms, 2011:425-427). For his part, Tim

Crouch stresses that it was essential for him as well as for the rest of the creative team to protect the integrity of the text, adding that the problem for the audience is that there is no guidance or help offered to them in *The Author*, and that the play may be confusing to some (Freshwater, 2010:184-185), especially 'if they don't really listen' (Bottoms, 2011:424).

Obviously, Tim Crouch is absolutely rigid about keeping the text as it is, and rightly so. *The Author* is not a text to be used as material in an interactive show, but a play, meaning a composition which adheres to its own rules and logic. As one of the two directors of the piece, a smith[3], puts it,

> […] during the course of the play – yes – there is an allegiance to the text; there is an allegiance to the act of theatre in that sense. There is a story to tell, with a beginning and a middle and an end, and if that is disrupted too much – or if that is invited to be disrupted too much – well, that's not really what we're interested in.
>
> (Bottoms, 2011:425)

Chris Goode, who was performing in the play, mentions that on a few occasions, they did have to say to audience members, one way or another, "can we just remind you that you're watching a play?" (Bottoms 2011:427). Indeed, why would the audience forget that they are watching a play? I believe, therefore, that the problem of participation in *The Author* is more complex than has been so far suggested, as well as intrinsic to the play. And, at the same time, it is precisely its 'problematic' side what makes it worthy of the attention given to it.

3.

As already mentioned, in *The Author* we find two plays, one within the other, the second written by a fictional version of Tim Crouch. Similarly, I suggest that we have more than one audience: there is the actual one and the fictional one(s). Audience #1 consists of those

[3] a smith (Andy Smith) and Karl James are the two directors of *The Author* and Tim Crouch's long-term collaborators.

individuals who decided to watch *The Author* on any given evening, in one of the cities and venues in which the show toured. Audience #2 is the concept of audience, in its generic form. Audience #3 is the Royal Court audience, which stands here for a synonym of an audience which is the product of a culture of voyeurism. Needless to say, Audience #2 and Audience #3 are conceptual – or, in other words, 'roles'. We could also take Audience #2 and Audience #3 as one, since they eventually merge together. Therefore, here I will make a distinction between the actual audience (ourselves) and the fictional one.

The actual audience is indeed mentioned by the playwright in the Performance Note. We read: 'The audience should be beautifully lit and cared for. When the audience is asked questions, these are direct questions that the audience are more than welcome to answer – but under no pressure to do so'. It is the same with the stage directions, which start with the phrase: 'An audience facing an audience in two banks of seats'. It is clear that Tim Crouch is referring to the actual people who will inhabit those two banks of seats.

This actual audience is acknowledged not just in the stage directions but in the play as well. *The Author* begins with Adrian[4] who acts as an audience member, exchanging names, Maltesers and small talk with the people seating around him. 'We are all going to have to pretend ourselves! Do you know that feeling,' says Adrian.

At this point, we are the audience of the play, people who chose to watch *The Author* on the same evening, largely strangers to each other, sitting next to each other, looking straight ahead at the people sitting in the opposite bank of seats. We may suspect that Adrian is not really one of us, not with all that enthusiasm and chattiness. We may suspect that his job is to make us feel comfortable in this unusual visibility that the space entails – to be visible as ourselves. At the beginning of the play, therefore, we are representing ourselves, sitting in two banks facing each other.

[4] It was actually Chris (Goode) in the performance I saw, as Adrian (Howells) had by that time left the show. I use the name 'Adrian' following the text of the published play.

The sense, however, that there is also another audience, apart from ourselves, comes a bit later on, when Adrian comments on 'how gorgeous we are'. There is the feeling that he is no longer speaking about us, or not us alone, because his comments are straying away from the convention of what we would normally say to each other in the theatre. Adrian in fact brings in a concept of audience, which is generic, impersonal but somehow familiar; indeed, we may have encountered it before, in various contemporary dramaturgies. This is a stock character that Sophie Nield names 'Spectator', a theatrical device of limited range, often found in 'immersive theatre'[5]:

> For how else is this theatre dreaming us? […] It doesn't know who we are. We, the audience, are either in the black hole into which theatre pours itself anxiously, or we are become it, in the guise of Spectator…
>
> (Nield, 2008:534)

As we enter the world of the fictional play, another audience joins in, taking the place of the generic concept mentioned above. This happens when Adrian informs us that he is a 'Friend of the Royal Court Theatre' and starts asking us if we are also 'Friends'. Now the generic concept of the audience has become something very specific. Suddenly, this space, which at first seemed completely empty, having nothing but two banks of seating facing each other, is filled in. Soon we are to discover that being the 'Royal Court Audience' is not a particularly flattering role: these are the people who enjoy watching (or consuming) violent shows regardless of the consequences – for themselves, to the performers, to the world – and who do not take responsibility for contributing to the culture of voyeurism.

4.

It is not, in my view, the lack of articulation of what the role of the audience is supposed to be

[5] Immersive theatre, by companies such as Punchdrunk or the Shunt collective, defines its practice around the facilitation of interaction with the audience.

in the play, or the role-playing as such, or the multiplication of audiences that confuses the spectator; for she recognizes these fictional audiences, or roles to play, as mere conventions which are there to help the story move forward. Instead, what we encounter in *The Author* is an altogether different sort of complexity.

Let us go back to the two plays within *The Author*. The first is the play we, the audience, came to see. The other is the abusive, fictional play that Tim Crouch's fictional character has written and is being discussed in length in *The Author*. This second play is presented to us solely through words. But the first play, the play we came to see, does not rely only on words, but proposes as well a powerful image: the two banks of seats facing each other. The seating arrangement is not simply one option among other possible ones. It is the arrangement that the play dictates, as it is clearly stated in the stage directions, which also inform us of the writer's intention:

> This is a play that happens inside its audience. As the audience enter the space, they encounter two banks of seating, facing each other, comfortably spaced apart but with no 'stage' in between. This must not be a confrontational configuration. The request the play makes is for us to be okay about ourselves, to gently see ourselves and ourselves seeing.
>
> (Crouch, 2009:164)

As a spectator, I didn't feel at ease. My first thought, when I entered the space, was that it bore a certain resemblance to the seating arrangement of the British Parliament, which carries a power related to a rhetorical authority within it. The structure instantly raises questions about the sort of participation it may entail. It is a space linked to participation, exchange, dialogue, representation.

Adrian possibly attempts to soften this impression when commenting on how much he loves the seating arrangement, being as versatile as it is. But this seating arrangement is anything but versatile. And possibly the spectators, entering this space, feel a little bit embarrassed,

and a little bit excited; and possibly some spectators would immediately choose a front seat while others would prefer to be the “backbenchers”, intimidated by the visibility that the space suggests. But it is obvious that one cannot co-habit in this space and hide. It is, at the same time, an auditorium and a stage, a place of theatre and a place of politics.

The Author is then, in this first instance, a play and an event. As the actors perform, so does the space, and some sort of exchange takes place between them, and between them and us, and also (and this doesn’t often happen in the theatre) between each one of us, as we look at each other in this fully-lit space. For, in a space like this, you are asked to acknowledge the other person not via some convention but rather as a representative of herself.

Thus, the seating arrangement promises a dialogue-based theatre, an aesthetic experience of exchange and communication, of diverse interpretations, meanings and points of view – and possibly, of political choices too. We may even suspect that there is some ironic hint in this seating arrangement, especially if we are familiar with the avant-garde tradition which, in Kester’s words

> should radically challenge the faith in the very possibility of rational discourse. This tendency is based on the assumption that the shared discursive systems (linguistic, visual, etc.) on which we rely for our knowledge of the world are dangerously abstract and violently objectifying.
>
> (Kester, 2004:12)

This view could also be reinforced by a certain suspicion about contemporary politics we may have, especially if the seating arrangement makes us indeed think of the British Parliament. Either way, this dialogical or anti-dialogical aesthetic (which is also highlighted by the fact that the play begins with direct questions to audience members) encourages us to think that we are there to explore what we are, collectively, as an audience. That the question about the audience is not left to the artist to work out and then share with us, but that it is something which it is up to us to find out, together, moving from our singularities towards a collective

body, and exploring our identity as audience, not as something fixed or predetermined but, on the contrary, as something open, fluid and, thus, always in process.

It also encourages us to think that the fabrication of a stage that includes us is there to question our habitual forms of perception and possibly make us conceive of theatre in different ways. For one, if theatre owes its existence to the fact that someone actually answered back, we are keen to see what this answering back really means.

5.

Keeping these thoughts in mind, I return to the previous question: Why would the audience forget that they are watching a play? When I watched the play in Brighton Theatre, no acts of violence, verbal or otherwise, took place. But part of the audience was apparently upset, and a few people did walk out. At some point, when Tim Crouch asked (and it had been clear by that time that this was a rhetorical question) if we felt okay, a man answered back to him. He said: 'No. But that's your show.'

In *The Author*, there are two banks of seats facing each other; an auditorium and a stage; a place of theatre and a place of politics. Surely the sort of behaviour that Tim Crouch describes on the part of some of the audience does not quite belong to the place of theatre. It does, however, belong to the place of politics. This is the image of the parliament: people eager to voice their opinions, and feelings, and angered when these opinions and feelings are left unanswered. People shouting, or worse (as is often the case in parliaments around the world), and, sometimes, walking out.

What I suggest here is that initially *The Author* makes a certain claim about the kind of invitation it addresses to the audience. This invitation is fundamentally political: it is about

providing a dialogical space for us to explore what we are as an audience, as a body of people who have gathered in this space to think, to speak, to construct meaning.

However, this expectation is not fulfilled. Firstly, because what we are given is soon taken away, as we find ourselves against the fixed conceptual audiences that Tim Crouch has prepared for us. These fictional audiences, or 'roles', express a solid idea of what an audience is: one that remains static, one that doesn't recognize the contingency of community and identity itself, one that is deprived of voice. Secondly, because we are not really expected to construct meaning ourselves but to verify what is already decided for us. There is a clear message in the play, there is a final intention in terms of what we are expected to make of it, and how we should let ourselves be 'educated' by it in some moral sense. The use of certain techniques (such as highly offensive language directed towards the audience) ensures that we will feel shame, or guilt, for being part of the chain of the voyeuristic culture that the play seeks to condemn. The message is clear and it is impossible for us not to feel its weight on our shoulders.

In 'A Conversation about Dialogue', Tim Crouch says:

> We ask an audience to listen. Unless the audience listen, then we're in danger – this play can veer off into strange places. But should I write a play that doesn't require an audience to listen? […] Or do I hold true and say, I'm sorry, but you need to listen! It's a live experience, and you need to be present.
>
> (Bottoms, 2011:427)

Apparently, Crouch proposes 'active listening' as a substitute for dialogue. In the same conversation, a smith adds that dialogue can be 'a silent thing'. It seems odd that Jacques Rancière is cited also as an influence for the play, when what Rancière does in *The Emancipated Spectator* is precisely to challenge these notions, such as active listening as opposed to a passive listening, and to argue against the implied role of the theatre-maker as

a teacher who tries to force some knowledge (or moral responsibility) into the students' heads.

That is not to say that Tim Crouch and a smith are necessarily wrong in suggesting that 'dialogue is not always a verbal thing', and that it can be a 'silent thing', a 'thinking together' or 'being together in a room' (Bottoms, 2011:425-430) in the place of theatre. But in the place of politics, the same suggestion is suspect, to say the least. If, therefore, by co-habiting within this space, the audience feels that they are part of an active process that guarantees them voice, now the audience feels disappointed, or even 'betrayed'.

Nonetheless, the play impresses with its cleverness, as an act of resistance has already been prescribed in the text: a plant walks out early on, indicating a model of action. Unfortunately, the fact that it is prescribed, and therefore 'allowed', means that it inevitably loses some of its gestural meaning as resistance. The audience, or part of it, will attempt to go further and even cross the line in order to come up with genuine acts of resistance. And some of these acts may be extreme, abusive, violent – as some of the audience reaction indeed was. Or, the audience maybe simply refuse to leave the place of politics, refuse to be representatives of anything other than themselves, refuse to follow Crouch into the world of his fictional play. 'That's your show', the audience member answered the playwright. For, in this case, the suggestion that the dialogue is a silent thing or that it's all about being together in a room (somehow echoing the phrase 'we are all in this together'), is, simply, for part of the audience, not good enough.

6.

The question that necessarily arises, then, is why the playwright saw the use of a primarily dialogical space, one with such powerful political connotations, as the only option. I put forward a hypothesis, in which the choosing of this space has to do with the negotiation of a paradox within *The Author*. On one hand, the play seeks to challenge violence in the act of

representation; on the other, it tries to achieve this by using verbal images of extreme violence (and, obviously, the fact that they are verbal does not make them any less horrifying for the audience). In other words: if *The Author* proposes descriptions of violence and abuse, rape, paedophilia, decapitation and so on, what is really its essential difference from the plays it supposedly criticizes? On what grounds can Crouch argue that his play is 'a rallying cry to stop the thoughtless representation of abuse' (2011b:418) and not in fact a product of the same culture of voyeurism he wants to expose?

The seating arrangement, with its resemblance to the British Parliament, stands as an authentic image of a place of politics, meaning a place of dialogue and exchange on serious matters. It suggests that it is more than a place of consumption – so, in this sense, it is a stage as well as the opposite of a stage. And therefore, *The Author* is nothing like the plays, and the culture, it targets. It is this claim of authenticity of dialogue that the space entails, that Tim Crouch finds useful and necessary. And this is possibly why this seating arrangement is the only option available for the staging of the play. Ironically, it is the claim of 'authenticity' that Tim Crouch wants to expose with this play: that is, the value of creative processes that require actors to undertake detailed research into experiences of traumatic violence in a search for authenticity (Freshwater, 2010:182).

It is possible that Crouch underestimates the power of the structure he proposes; for this sort of structure makes demands that cannot be easily put aside. And if we are to consider whether the play really reinstates the authority of the writer, or the text, or the audience, maybe we have to consider the possibility that, in this case, the authority really belongs to the space. Yet, with all its inherent tensions, and contradictions, and even regardless of the playwright's intention, *The Author* undoubtedly manages to create a debate about all those things, and to make us challenge our own notions about the audience, and about the coming together of theatre and politics – or the frictions between them.

The inner spectator: this is a kind of spectator who, as an invisible other, wanders in

the inner side of the text; it[6] moves things forward or puts things together, and is both inventor and invention of the text.

The inner spectator belongs to the text – which is necessarily a theatre text, as no other text can accommodate it – for it is an invention of the text. It can never be identified with the actual spectator, or the spectator-as-character, a role for the audience prescribed in a play, for the actual spectator is located outside the universe of the play and can be only represented, to some extent, in it, whereas the inner spectator is located within this universe and shapes, together with the other elements of the play (characters, images, rhythms, structures and so on), the universe of the play.

Apart from being an invention of the text, the inner spectator is also inventing it, by performing as a mechanism for the creation of meaning, for when it comes to the theatre text, meaning is not created by the textual material alone, but rather by the arrangement between two realities, namely the page and the stage. These two realities, which include the written word, the spoken word, the human body and everything in between, are both present in the process of the writing of a play. It is their coming together through the tensions and constraints they create for one another, as well as the possibilities they open for one another, that make up the theatrical universe we call a play.

Beneath the inner spectator's gaze, these two realities become one: what is there in the play and what is implied, the said and the unsaid, the words and the images, all these can come together as theatre only if viewed from the place of the one who is watching. In this way, the inner spectator is an indispensable part of the theatre text, already there from the very beginning of the process of writing.

[6] The inner spectator is a mechanism, and thus the neutral gender is possibly more appropriate than other options.

The seven parts of *Lucas and Time* are formed through the interaction between the inner spectator and the various figures of the play, in a choreography of presence and absence in which they are constantly swapping the roles of the 'loved object' and the 'lover' between them. These terms I borrow from Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse, Fragments:* the 'loved object' is defined as 'atopos', namely 'unclassifiable, of a ceaselessly unforeseen originality' (1978:34), and the 'lover' as the one who 'creates meaning, always and everywhere, out of nothing, for it is meaning which thrills him: he is in the crucible for meaning' (ibid.:67).

ONE opens with a narrator named Maia:

she is narrating a story in which she turns out to be a character. Right away, we find in this monologue two contrasting images: the first is a stage image (a female actor, alone, in a bare stage). The second image is conjured up by Maia's narration (a picnic by a river, food and wine, sunlight, a woman and a man). These two realities, in their stark difference, co-exist in the same theatrical universe and produce meaning only when they are looked at from a third perspective, that of the inner spectator.

But there is also another conflict in the scene: Maia begins her monologue by pointing out (to whom?) that she 'stands on the bank and looks down at the water', thus defining the space she is in at this very moment as a river bank, contradicting thus the stage image, which is a woman delivering a monologue in a bare stage. The tension between the two images, both claiming to be in present time, can only be understood if we accept that the character is conscious of the presence of the inner spectator, and answers to the inner spectator's implied question: 'Where are you right now?'

We could also assume that there is the initiation of a game between the character and the inner spectator, for they are both narrators although each of a different kind. Following Genette (1980), the game here is between a narrator who is also a character in the story, that

is a homo-diegetic narrator, and a narrator who is not a character in the story but in a way hovers above it and knows everything about it, namely a hetero-diegetic narrator. I am suggesting that the inner spectator could be seen as a hetero-diegetic narrator who, however, belongs to the inner machineries of the text and whose narration acts can only be inferred by the words and actions of the characters of the play, as well as by the play's forms and language.

We, as the actual readers or spectators, become aware of this game between the character and the inner spectator when, towards the end of the narration, Maia announces her 'grand finale of her improvisations', making us doubt that there was actually any truth in her story. (And what purpose would her made-up story serve, if not to play according to the rules of a game?) And, then, her final lines: 'When I finally turn to look / the world has dissolved in an exaggerated, white light'. Is it just the world of her own narration that is been suddenly erased? Or is her original statement about where she was cancelled as well? The final line implies that this is indeed the case: 'the river bank disappears. It is now replaced by an intense, white light' (and that can be taken to mean stage lighting).

The monologue, as a theatrical form, highlights the fact that someone is speaking while someone else is assumed to be listening and watching. A spectator is implied, but it can be neither a representation of the actual spectator in the text, nor a role for the audience prescribed in it, for the scene involves a constant and dynamic exchange of roles, a swapping between 'loved object' and 'lover': for instance, Maia becomes a spectator of herself having a picnic with Lucas at the other side of the river. This interaction between the character and the inner spectator is what produces the mechanisms of the play in the process of its creation, giving the play its shape, its rhythm, its structures, its possible meanings.

There is a stage direction missing from this first scene.

A female performer. A bare stage. Deciding whether this stage direction should be added at

the beginning of the scene or not was not easy. For it would be the only reference in the whole play of a reality outside it, since it clearly points to the stage: not the concept of the stage, as it is incorporated in the play, but the actual stage as the place where actual performances take place, revealing the existence of another theatrical system.

That is not to say that a new dramatic play cannot incorporate that other reality in a very matter-of-fact way: this is something that often occurs – as in Tim Crouch's *The Author,* for instance, where actorly practices and the formation of the shared space as stage and auditorium, which signals contemporary theatre practices, is part of the play's gesture. But in the case of *Lucas and Time,* the relationship with the actual spectator and the stage is not a given.

However, it is true that the argument for the function of the inner spectator in this scene depends on our imagining of a single performer alone on a bare stage. Without this stage direction, nothing guarantees that a staging would not follow a completely different path, cancelling out the mechanisms I have just described. I have the sense that the new dramatic play requires, most of all, a reading that can comprehend and accommodate its workings: for it is a theatre text forever in movement, in search of new configurations – and in so doing it also looks at the issue of theatricality afresh.

Plays have at least three audiences. Novels have one, the reader. Roughly put, a literary piece of work is written with the reader in mind,

and it is the reader that the publisher, too, will consider when deciding whether or not to publish. But the play's condition is rather complex, for it has different audiences with distinct needs and expectations. The first audience of the play, then, consists of theatre professionals, most of all directors. These are the people who decide on the future of the text: for a play has to be produced in order to claim a place in the public realm. And, apart from a

few exceptions, it is published only when it is performed on stage. This means that the play has to become appealing to this special category of readers; for they read plays with certain concerns in mind, which do not necessarily involve considering the play 'for itself', but for what it can offer. The play is examined in terms of what kind of opportunity it may offer to the theatre maker to exhibit his/her own skills. For theatre practitioners, more often than not, weigh up a play in relation to its ability to convince them that it can do things for them.

But the play will also be examined in terms of practicalities related to the economy of the practice of theatre. The size of the cast or the size of the stage required are things to take into account. The play has to allow the producer to think that the expected production will be manageable, transferable and low-risk in terms of money, especially in the case of fringe productions. That is why, for instance, in a great number of plays, characters often number four or less. The economy of theatre also explains practices such as the workshopping of plays, which has increased in popularity over the years. Plays receive a certain treatment in order to become suitable for a specific venue, a specific budget, a specific audience, and so on.

The second audience is the actual reader. Although plays are often bought as souvenirs by the theatre-goers after a performance, sometimes they are also read. And sometimes, they are read by people who have not seen them on stage. How a play looks on the page is important. Taking care of the text as a literary work means directing it on the page: the beats and pauses, the punctuation, the length of the lines, the stage directions and how these interact with the words to be spoken, all create a form that speaks of an aesthetic proposition. This proposition may seem to the unaccustomed reader unwelcoming at first: the words may spread out in strange formations, containing very few stage directions, if any at all, and there may be little guidance on how they should be read.

The third audience is the spectator. Sometimes the spectator takes a visible place within the

text: he or she may be cast as a character in the play, or participate collectively as 'audience', either directly addressed or even fleetingly acknowledged, just so that some sort of attestation of connection between text and audience will be achieved. In Caryl Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, a play inspired by the English Civil War which has just been revived for the National Theatre[7] having first shown in 1976, the audience as 'the people' are asked to speak up if they have something to contribute to the arguments (of the Putney Debates) presented on the stage. It is obvious that the actual audience is not expected to say anything at all, but the subtle address serves as a reminder that the rhetoric put forward is not about the past but the here and now (a point, of course, highlighted by the fact that the show was programmed to be taking place during election times).

Not all knowledge will be equally accessible to all the play's audiences. Inevitably, in some cases the reader of the play will know details that the spectator won't. The reader of *Lucas and Time*, for example, will know immediately, just by quickly scanning the pages, that the play consists of seven different parts, and that in each chapter we find different characters, whereas the spectator may realize this later on, and possibly after his/her first attempts at making meaning in a neat, linear way have proven futile. The reader and the spectator, thus, may find themselves experiencing the play differently from one another.

And then, the different audiences' needs may prove conflicting. Too many stage directions guide the reader but put off the director – who may feel that the play has already been directed by the writer. Too much openness may excite the director but frustrate the reader. Assigning a clear role to the spectator runs the risk of ending up with a text that dictates the directing, the set design, the lights, and even the audience reaction itself, as in Tim Crouch's *The Author*, discussed in the first part of this chapter. Not a surprise, really, that the play's two directors were already present in the process of writing.

[7] Staged at the Lyttelton Theatre from 25 April to 22 June 2015.

How the play deals with this different knowledge and conflicting needs and expectations, how it negotiates between the audiences or does not negotiate, what kind of tensions and conflicts it allows to bring to the surface or tries to conceal, what sort of responsibility it takes towards these audiences or whether it refuses any responsibility whatsoever: all these distinguish, in my opinion, new plays – in the sense of plays being written at the present time often referred to as 'new writing' – from what I call the new dramatic play. The difference, I believe, is a political one: it's about intentions, purposes, ambitions. It is about deciding what kind of work a play is, and what sort of contribution it makes.

If practice-led research is a type of research in which practice is not meant to function as a support system to an already formed theory, but to help reflect on the subject in question in diverse ways,

beginning with the practitioner's observations, and thus contribute to the making of an apparatus of a creative critical methodology that traverses contemporary philosophies and practices and looks at things afresh, then it can truly work as an intervention to the conventions of academic thinking and writing. Of course, there is no guarantee that practice leads to an approach 'fresh and new, uncontaminated by received ideas ingrained habits of thought' (Saunders, 2014:xii); all that remains are trial and error and a willingness to take risks.

Some troubling questions (posed by a nagging voice in my head): what sort of things can I present as evidence? Is it a good idea to engage with a research project in which I hope to discover what exactly I am doing as I am doing it? And if I hit a dead-end, is that a process worth recording? But then again, if artistic work goes hand in hand with all sorts of risks (and, in this case, the risks related to *Lucas and Time* are going to be exposed in the course of this thesis), then inevitably the writing on the artistic work cannot but respond to, and allow itself to be exposed to and infected by, the risks and uncertainties of the artistic creation itself.

‘What about the evidence?’ the voice persists, and now I recognize it: it is the voice of the implied reader. For, naturally, if this is writing that connects, evolves around and challenges its “subject” – a play called *Lucas and Time,* which plays with various notions and constructions of an implied audience – then the present writing has to invent an audience and give it a visible place within it. This reader, similarly to the inner spectator, could be atopos and of a ceaselessly unforeseen originality. Or, this implied reader could be the sort of old-time academic who simply doesn’t have much taste for experimentations, and whom Umberto Eco describes in the opening pages of *Confessions of a Young Novelist* as his thesis examiner. I will refer to him as ‘Umberto Eco’s examiner’:

> When I presented my doctoral dissertation on the aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas – a very controversial subject, since at that time scholars believed there were no aesthetic reflections in his immense body of work – one of my examiners charged me with a sort of ‘narrative fallacy’. He said that a mature scholar, when setting out to do some research, inevitably proceeds by trial and error, making and rejecting different hypotheses, but at the end of the inquiry, all those attempts should have been digested and the scholar should present only the conclusions. In contrast, he said, I told the story of my research as if it were a detective novel
>
> (Eco, 2011:6-7).

Indeed, the implied reader of this thesis could very well be that examiner. It is morning, or perhaps it is early afternoon, his desk is slightly untidy but nevertheless authoritative enough for the occasion, and a subtle breeze comes through the open window, making a series of post-its on the wall wave. Or, perhaps, it is raining; he shuts the window. He takes a sip of his steaming cup of tea and says in a friendly manner (that he is friendly is also affirmed by Umberto Eco’s account in his *Confessions*) – and what he says has nothing to do with research that proceeds by trial and error, neither with his conviction that a mature student’s job should be to present only conclusions, for he is now well aware of the fact that these things are an inevitable part of practice-led research, and that the practice-led research is to be endorsed even when an old-time academic like himself feels a little bit uncomfortable with it – so, yes, he says: ‘That’s all very nice, but what sort of evidence are you going to present?’

The word evidence is found in very different disciplines, from science to law to archaeology. Studying the concept of evidence in those disciplines, Thomas Kelly, in his entry in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy entitled Evidence, concludes that evidence 'consists paradigmatically of physical objects, or perhaps, physical objects arranged in certain ways. For presumably, physical objects are the sort of thing which one might place in a plastic bag, dig up from the ground, send to a laboratory, or discover among the belongings of an individual of historical interest' (Kelly, 2014).

The concept of evidence is also central to philosophy, especially epistemology, where it goes together with that of justification. The above entry moves from Russell to Quine to Williamson and others to present concepts of evidence that include sense data, sensory receptor stimulations, known propositions or even one's current mental state (which means that we may identify one's evidence as those beliefs of which one is psychologically certain). Indeed, as the article notes, from the perspective of ordinary thought and talk about evidence, much philosophical theorizing about evidence would seem to embody a particularly grotesque category mistake (ibid.). The concept of justification is equally problematic, especially if we think that it is identified with reason: for, what we consider common sense would immediately reject much of what we accept as philosophical reasoning (as pure nonsense).

2.
The Text-Spectacle

Monday 5 October 2015: I take the train to Cambridge to see the last performance of *The Hundred Years' War: the Somme to Afghanistan.*[8]

It features forty poems or so, from all over the world, written between 1914 and 2013: the Battle of the Somme, the Troubles in Ireland, conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Middle East, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the war in Afghanistan. The poems, found in the anthology *The Hundred Years' War: Modern War Poems*, are edited by Neil Astley, who observes in the introductory note that the poets are writing 'as combatants on opposite sides, or as victims, or anguished witnesses' (2012:17).

As I am heading to the Mumford Theatre of the Anglia Ruskin University, though, I know little about the performance I am going to watch. I enter the theatre and the stage is dark apart from a small, kite-shaped space in the middle, and a few objects (three stools, a table, a blanket, an accordion) are carefully placed in this lit space, waiting. In the auditorium, some people are waiting too. Not a big crowd. Someone asks what the show is about and someone answers that it is staged poetry. Someone says that staged poetry is a wonderful idea, and someone remembers that she has forgotten her bag just outside and hurries out, assuring us that she will be back in a minute. Someone suggests that she won't come back at all (indeed, she didn't). Then the house lights turn off completely. And so we, the audience, remain quiet in our seats: five or six people, some being there for the poetry and others despite it.

Three performers enter and take their place in the lit space. Each performer is assigned a

[8] The show was directed by Steve Byrne and produced by Midlands Creative Projects in association with the Belgrade Theatre Coventry and Bloodaxe Books. It toured in various cities in the UK.

number of poems. While the one who is performing uses body, face, pitch and intensity of voice to convey the meaning of the poem, as well as the emotions of the poet (who is writing as combatant, victim or anguished witness), the other two remain still, with their gaze fixed on him/her.

This is not an unusual technique in theatre. For instance, in a recent production of Jo Clifford's play *Every One*, directed by Chris Goode at the Battersea Arts Centre,[9] we watch a group of actors delivering monologues in which they explain who they are (the parents, the children, the drooling grandmother in a wheelchair) and speak about their relationship with the other members of the family, and, later in the play, express their sorrow for the sudden death of the mother. During each monologue the other actors look at the one performing although, on some occasions, they choose to symbolically turn their back to the deceased – who is accompanied by Death (also a character in the play) – or to glance at us, the audience, as if to make sure we are still watching. The actors stay quietly in their corner and just look, or not look, without ever slipping out of their roles, simply because the play's structures hold everything in place.

It is often in contemporary theatre that actors may treat their roles like a costume which they can drop at any moment so that they comment on it, or exchange it for a new one; this is something theatre and performance still explores for the effect of estrangement, and for what has been described, as Sarrazac notes (2002:61-62), as 'emptying the stage so that the present-ness of theatre can emerge'. It is an aesthetic advocated by Brecht and Artaud, amongst others, according to which 'the exposition of the specific elements that make up the reality of theatre allows the present-ness of the scenic event to reveal'. Sarrazac explains that 'present-ness, asserted by the literalness principle, was the great concern of the 1950s and 1960s', and that literalness came to be perceived as 'the only path that could lead to the

[9] The show took place from 2 to 19 March 2016. *Every One* is Jo Clifford's take on the Medieval morality play *Everyman.* It was produced by Chris Goode and Company and Battersea Arts Centre.

advent of theatricality'[10]. He gives the example of Barthes, who was fascinated by an electric billiard table (in Arthur Adamov's play *Le Ping-Pong*) and saw it as a 'literal object', an object 'whose dramaturgic and scenic function is not to symbolize anything but to simply be present and, through the obstinacy of its presence, to produce actions and circumstances, even if these were issuing from language itself' (ibid.). Obviously, in theatre there is no such thing as 'to simply be present'; the act of being present as an actor, rather than a character, is transformed through the function of metonymy into another layer of theatrical meaning. This technique relies on the actors always remaining within a theatrical universe, which is provided by the play and its staging.

In the performance of staged poetry I'm now watching, however, after the final line of each of their assigned poems, the actors are left on stage as temporarily discarded. This is because their reciting of the poems, however animated it may be, expresses the consciousness solely of the poet in each instance, and leaves no space for other voices. Perhaps the actors here are more like 'translators', as their job seems to be not to narrate or impersonate the poet or the characters of the poem, and neither do they act as rhapsodes, since they offer no commentary on the poems: rather, they seem engaged in some sort of negotiation between the stage and the poetry.

And thus, when not reciting, the performers remain on the stage literally stripped of meaning: neither invisible nor visible, neither present nor absent, neither actors nor spectators but people waiting in line, actors 'in potentia', surrounded by props also lined up to be eventually used (or not). For there is no theatrical universe to maintain them, and whose mechanisms would transform their presence on the stage into a theatrical sign, part of a composition.

The world conjured up by these poems, predominantly through images of war, is a world

[10] Michael Fried's well-known essay 'Art and Objecthood' (1967) attacked literalness (minimalism) for it made the surrounding event of the exhibition as important as the work itself, and thus relied on a theatrical relationship for its success.

elsewhere, an alternative place that has nothing to do with the stage. In front of me, there is no stage. Obviously, I don't mean it literally (just there, in front of me, there is a stage) but in a theatrical sense. This is because there are no stage images to be found in the poems. There is no implied stage or implied audience; there is nothing in those poems that would make the connection with the stage a necessary and inevitable thing. And so the language of these poems does not inhabit the stage. The words, without a sense of belonging to the stage, have no gravity. The words are floating.

Certainly, drama and poetry have evolved through a process of continuous exchange and transformation, although they have been defined by their own distinct rules and logic, which marks them two different genres. The play is a text conscious of the fact that it is a theatre text. It is exactly this consciousness that allows it to incorporate everything that happens on the stage. And here, I think, lies an essential difference between the play and the poem. Of course, we can speak of more theatrical poems and less theatrical ones, but this distinction already admits a fundamental difference between the two genres, which we can call theatricality.[11]

Another interesting thing about these poems is that their content does not match their form. While they conjure up powerful images of a world in turmoil, with the sounds of battlefield, and the agony of the wounded in the hospitals, and the desperation of the survivors and of the witnesses, their form as lyric poems could (and is known to have been used to) accommodate any content. Nothing in this form speaks of war; in fact, if we stopped paying attention to the actual words but focused only the structure of the poems, their rhythmical patterns and style, we would possibly think that these must be love poems.[12]

[11] As Samuel Weber notes, 'the notions of "theatre" and "theatricality" are anything but self-evident or unambiguous. They have a vexed and complex history, and only by articulating some of the major traits and tendencies of this history can we begin to investigate the renewed significance these terms are acquiring today' (2004:1). This task however is outside the scope of this thesis. My own use of the word 'theatricality' is explained in the process of this discussion.

[12] These poems are written with the use of the four-beat rhythm, arranged in the 4x4 formation. According to Derek Attridge, this formation 'produces a very familiar and insistently regular rhythm'; he points out that it is the most common rhythmic pattern, one we find in most popular music, folk, hymns,

Thinking about these poems' form leads me back to the stage. The lit space is where the performance takes place, while the rest of the stage is to be ignored. The division of the stage between 'visible' and 'invisible' is usually made in theatre in order to accommodate various needs of the set design and the directing. For instance, an invisible space on stage is often necessary to help the actors disappear without much fuss (and reappear equally easily, if there is such a need). But here, the splitting of the stage between visible and invisible doesn't seem to serve any purpose of practical nature, as the performers remain in the lit space throughout the whole performance, whether performing or not.

I see the cropped stage as an attempt to deal with the above problem of form. Starting with the fact that, in these poems, form and content don't happen together literally or physically, so to speak, it is possible to assume that the stage presentation of these poems, with the confined kite-shaped space and the soothing lightning, reproduces the sense of comfort and intimacy that their form suggests, which is set against the sounds of war and the actual content of the poems. Perhaps the attempt here is an increasing of the tension between the lyric form/the cropped stage and the content of the poems, which is dedicated to war, in order for some sense of theatricality to emerge.

What I'm watching, I think, is an attempt to attach these poems to something solid: on the tension, on the one hand, between the form of the poems, the intimacy of the lit space and the objects it contains, and the actual content, the images of war and the recorded sounds of helicopters, and battle, and war reportages on the other. This is also an attempt to attach these poems to the 'joint text'[13] – that is the 'text' between the performers and ourselves: throughout the show, the performers look straight at us, trying to engage us in direct eye contact – and if we agree to let ourselves be convinced, if we accept the poet's

nursery rhymes, ballads from the Middle Ages to the present time and in much of printed poetry (1995:53-4).

[13] According to Lehmann, 'the theatre performance turns the behaviour onstage and in the auditorium into a *joint text*, a 'text' even if there is no spoken dialogue on stage or between actors and audience. Therefore, the adequate description of theatre is bound to the reading of this total text' (2006:17).

consciousness as our own (as a collective consciousness made right there), then we would all be transported to this elsewhere, to the battlefield, or the hospital with the wounded. This is the offer, I think, that is being made.

Staged poetry is nothing new. 'The theatre of the Symbolists', writes Hans-Thies Lehmann, 'marked a step on the way to postdramatic theatre because of its undramatic stasis and the tendency towards monological forms' (2006:57). Lehmann cites Maeterlinck, among others, who, eager to be done with the dramatic conventions such as action, remarked that, 'the play has to be above all a poem' (ibid.:58). The Symbolist idea of theatre focused on text as poetry, separated from the stage. Indeed, in the so-called 'lyrical drama', the intention was to pull apart movement and language; however, as Lehmann admits, lyrical drama only enjoyed an episodic existence, since the 'decomposition of the dramatic model could only come into its own when the illusion of represented reality was consistently abandoned, which only happened in the latter postdramatic forms of theatre' (ibid.). Lehmann explains his point further: the reason lyrical drama was short-lived was that, 'practitioners did not yet have the technical means for giving the stage poetry such a density that poetic word and stage reality would not hopelessly fall apart' (ibid.:60).

Lehmann considers, thus, theatrical heteroglossia as an important element of what he calls postdramatic theatre. In the case of stage poetry, heteroglossia is guaranteed through the co-existence of two different languages on the stage: the poetic one (represented by the text, namely the poems) and the theatrical one (represented by the visual aspect, or the 'stage reality'). Lehmann here acknowledges the problematic coexistence of the two as a problem of 'density' that can be solved with the employment of advanced technical means. But what does he mean exactly by 'density'? In physics, the word density describes the quantity of mass per unit volume of a substance. It is used in many similar contexts, for instance to describe the quantity of people in a given area (population density). Its most obvious synonyms are compactness, solidity, thickness or even stickiness.

I suspect that the use of the word density here actually implies composition: the reason why the poetic word and the stage reality fall apart is that they are two different languages that don't necessarily stick together, they don't create a whole, they don't form a composition. Lehmann's suggestion, that technology would circumvent this problem and make these two languages work together, means, in fact, that the visual aspect/stage reality would be reinforced and thus able to transform the poetic word into a theatrical sign, and incorporate it into its theatrical system. However, this inevitably means that: a) the poetic word has to become 'theatrical', part of the stage reality, and thus Lehmann's celebration of two separate realities on stage, in his discussion of staged poetry, is proven a utopia; and b) composition is the condition of theatre. Therefore, the claim that the postdramatic theatre opposes the Aristotelian dramatic model by 'bringing back some of the chaos' is to be understood simply as arranging things in slightly different ways.

The performance of staged poetry I am now watching falls apart precisely for the same reason, namely that the poetic word and the stage reality fail to produce a theatrical machine: the poems lack the theatrical qualities that would allow them to connect with the stage, whereas the staging does make attempts to create a shared theatrical reality (as by exploiting the tension between form and content, and thus responding to the dramatic demand for conflict) but only momentarily and without providing theatrical answers for a number of aspects of the performance, including the role of the actors discussed above.

As I was riffling the pages of *A Heiner Müller Reader*, a collection of Müller's shorter pieces compiled and commented on by Carl Weber, I stumbled on an enigma: *Ajax for Instance* was subtitled as 'a poem/performance text'.

In the accompanying note, Weber informs us that the piece was first published in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one of Germany's leading national newspapers, on 29 October 1995. He

offers, though, no explanation why this particular poem is to be considered also a performance text. *Ajax for Instance* (*Ajax zum Beispiel*) was indeed used as one of the textual materials of a production entitled *Germania Stücke*, directed by Dimiter Gotscheff, which opened on 23 September 2004 in Deutsches Theater in Berlin. That was already nine years after Müller's death. Peter Staatsmann, who worked in the production as a dramaturg, explains that Gotscheff's original idea was to include a number of Müller's poems; after the first four weeks of rehearsals, though, the director finally ended up with a collage of 16 texts that contained no poems other than *Ajax for Instance* (2009:60–1).

It is unclear, however, why Carl Weber, already from the first edition of his book in 2001, marks it as a 'performance text'. Weber points out that, 'the author, conducting a dialogue with himself, contemplates the difficulties he encountered in writing a tragedy based on Sophocles' *Ajax* and what might be causing them' (2001:154). The opening lines confirm this. In addition, Müller, throughout the poem, makes references to theatre:

> TO MONEY THRONG AT MONEY CLING ALL THINGS
> Groans Faust in Goethe's sarcophagus in Weimar
> With the broken voice of Einer Schleef
> Who is rehearsing his choruses in Schiller's skull

And, later on, he considers including the ghost of Stalin as a character and wonders:

> What kind of text should I put in his mouth
> Or stuff it down his throat depending on the point of view

Meanwhile other theatre images emerge, among them:

> Or Trotsky the axe of Macbeth still in his skull
> The fist raised in the Bolshevik salute
> In a German tank's turret Hamlet the Jew

Is it possible, then, that Weber labels *Ajax for Instance* a 'performance text' because of its content? Müller does employ theatrical images and continuously makes theatrical references; he thematizes his agony for writing a tragedy; he identifies with Sophocles' Ajax. Would those things mark a text as a 'performance text'?

In the opening lines of *Ajax for Instance* we find a narrator, Müller himself. We read:

> [..]
> I dinosaur but not one of Spielberg's sit
> Pondering the possibility
> Of writing a tragedy Holy simplicity
> In a hotel in Berlin the unreal capital
> My gaze through the window is caught
> By the Mercedes star
> Rotating in the night sky dolefully –
> Above the gold fillings from Auschwitz and other branches
> of Deutsche Bank – on top of the Europa Centre

It is clear from the first lines, therefore, that this is a self-referential piece of writing, an internal monologue in which the poet gives himself a central position, and in which place and time are also defined. All the images that follow are located within the linearity of Müller's internal monologue: historical figures, such as Hitler and Stalin, theatrical characters such as Faust and Macbeth, ancient figures such as Phidias and Ajax (and even a Hollywood star, Arnold Schwarzenegger). They all belong to this basic 'plot': the images created, the forwards and backwards in time, the characters that emerge in the text, in all their fragmentation, all is encompassed in Müller's monologue as a series of free associations. The unifying thread that holds everything together and gives them meaning is Müller's identification with Sophocles' Ajax.

> I read Sophocles AJAX for instance Description
> Of an animal test Faded tragedy
> Of a man with whom a whimsical goddess

Plays blindman's buff before Troy in the ages' abyss
Arnold Schwarzenegger in DESERT STORM –
To make myself clear to contemporary readers –
I AJAX VICTIM OF TWOFOLD DECEPTION

Ajax is one of the ill-fated warriors of the Trojan War. After Achilles dies on the battlefield, Ajax and Odysseus fight to recover his body from the Trojans, and they succeed. But Achilles' divine armour, forged on Mount Olympus by the smith-god Hephaestus, is given to Odysseus. It's not that Ajax has done less for the Greeks, but Odysseus is particularly good with words, and so he gets the armour and the honour. In Sophocles' tragedy, written in the fifth century BC, Ajax, furious at the unfair treatment, wants revenge by killing the leaders of the Greek expedition, the kings Agamemnon and Menelaus. But goddess Athena intervenes: she blurs his mind and vision and Ajax ends up slaughtering a flock of sheep instead. After he recovers, he finds himself covered in blood and shame.

Ajax's sin is common among the heroes of the Greek tragedies: excessive pride and defiance of the gods, which inevitably leads to nemesis. Now, with his pride shattered, Ajax sees no alternative other than to kill himself. In the poem, Müller identifies with Ajax. He is Ajax, and also a man in Stalinstadt in Frankfurt Oder district, who 'trampled with his feet the image of the dead dictator and hanged himself from the now available hood'.[14]

What Müller has in mind may be the failure of the revolutionary German intellectuals and the demise of the working-class movement in Germany, as well as the process of reunification itself. Müller was indeed 'at a critical distance from the processes of that would soon subsume East Germany. The Western press made much of Müller's oppositional stance' (Varney, 2003:5). Did Müller see this as a twofold deception, similar to the deception Ajax experienced from both the Greeks and the goddess Athena? Again, none of these things, in my opinion, explains why *Ajax for Instance* should be perceived as a performance text.

[14] At the time, Müller was in the final stages of cancer.

Interestingly, there is another poem by Müller that is also marked as a performance text: *The Death of Seneca* (*Der Tod des Seneca*), which belongs to a series of Roman-themed poems, written during the last period of Müller's life. In his article *Sprachtheater, Zu Senecas Tod von Heiner Müller*[15], Hans-Thies Lehmann points out that this text performs theatrically, but not because Müller's texts are anyway infected by his thinking on theatre, nor because Seneca was also a dramatic writer. It is because the poem is arranged as a series of stage appearances, pantomimes and theatrical scenes: 'What Seneca thought (and never said)' is a phrase that opens the stage every time. For, clearly, in this text, there is a stage. The phrases 'and never said' and 'silent finally', which is the ending line, are put in parentheses; what we have here is the refusal of speech as a conscious and emphatic act of silence. It is precisely the limits of speech that this text deals with. How can speech, as a written scene, as theatre-writing, express its own limits? Lehmann suggests that the answer is given by the text itself, namely that language can articulate its limits only as theatre, as a silent performance contained within speech.

> Theatre is a spectacle […] an experience we don't understand, for it contains a paradox: the language of theatre, even when expressed, cannot be understood in the way other languages are understood. Rather, it has to be understood as something that cannot be understood. […] It is the swallowing that leads to silence, and not silence itself, that theatre articulates. Theatre has to be the theatre of the continuous death of language.
>
> (Lehmann, 2003:59)

In the closing lines of *Ajax for Instance,* we read:

> And so on whatever the language tolerates
>
> Or the dictionary of German rhymes
>
> The final program is the invention of silence

[15] All translations from German are by K. A. Alatsis for the purposes of this thesis.

Weber assumes that, 'the text ends with the conclusion that the act of writing itself may have become useless' (2001:157). In my reading, Müller admits no such thing. On the contrary, the final programme, and the invention of silence, is the theatre text. *Ajax for Instance* is not written for performance but as preparation material in the form of a poem, in which Müller lays out his thoughts, his agony, his anger, all to be transformed into a theatre text that speaks of the act of silence and thus saves him and sets him free.

I'm watching a performance of staged poetry entitled *The Hundred Years' War: the Somme to Afghanistan*, in which three actors perform a series of poems: while one performs, the other two sit quietly and observe him/her. But there are occasional exceptions

in which some sort of interaction or collaboration develops between the performers: the two silent performers momentarily leave their corner and jump into the world of the poem and enact, in some sketchy way, the characters and the situation described in it.

It is not that these particular poems are necessarily more 'theatrical' than the rest of the poems that comprise this show, but that they are used theatrically. Any text can be used theatrically: a poem (like *Ajax for Instance* in Dimiter Gotscheff's production), or a novel, or a book of nonfiction, or a newspaper clipping. Even the telephone book can be used theatrically.

And then, there is text written specifically for performance: this sort of writing may look like a poem, or prose. It may look like a piece of non-fiction, such as an academic article. It may

look like the telephone book. It may look like a mass of unlinked facts, 'structured as a maddening accumulation' (Etchells, 2015), such as the following.

> A table has four legs. A prison cell has four corners. A window is an opening in the wall of a room built by people who want to see outside. A hostage is a prisoner used to bargain with. A bargain is a deal or an arrangement where one person has one thing and the other wants it and the first person has something that the other wants and they make an exchange so that each is more happy. A fart is gas that escapes from a body. Torture is a way of hurting people, in the belief that this will make them tell you things you need to know. Some bridges fall down under specific circumstances. A layer of ozone protects us from the rays of the sun. Lions, horses and women can make interesting subjects for statues.
>
> (ibid.)[16]

The performance text is usually a text devised during rehearsals. The devised text is produced by a group of theatre makers who will also perform it (often for a specific venue, framework, and so on). Although the devised text is normally perceived as a collective work, it doesn't necessarily have to be created collectively or during rehearsals, at least not entirely. It is, however, a text inseparable from its 'stage text' (the stage text is also known as 'performance text'.)

The semiological notion of text has given us the notion of performance (or stage) text: this is the relationship of all the signifying systems used in performance, whose arrangement and interaction constitute the mise-en-scène. The notion of performance text is therefore an abstract and theoretical one, not an empirical or practical one. It considers the performance as a scale model in which the production of meaning may be observed. The performance text may be recorded in a production book, a Modellbuch, or another metatext that presents a notation (necessarily an incomplete one) of the staging, and in particular of its aesthetic and ideological options (Pavis and Shantz, 1998).

[16] *Sight is the Sense that Dying People Tend to Lose First*, written and directed by Tim Etchells, and available on his website. It was first staged in 2008, although I saw it at the Battersea Arts Centre in January 2013, performed by Jim Fletcher.

It is not really a surprise that the devised written text and the stage text share the term 'performance text'. It is because the devised text doesn't stand as an independent work, but it is part of a larger work that includes it as its textual material, alongside the mise-en-scène. This is the reason why performance texts don't receive stagings other than the original, even when they get published and thus are available to all. For instance, the texts composed by Forced Entertainment or Complicite, although published, have not been produced by a different group of theatre makers.

(And now it becomes clear why Weber's suggestion that *Ajax for Instance* is a performance text doesn't hold. Regardless of the abundance of theatre references in it, there is no indication of a stage text in this piece.[17])

Therefore, when we speak of performance text, we speak of a text that is written specifically for performance: a text that is part of a stage text and either contains no theatrical elements and no theatrical consciousness of its own but functions within this specific stage text, or, in cases in which the text is a substantial part of the performance and usually quite lengthy, the text contains within itself theatrical systems, which work alongside the stage text, for which it is written.

Similarly to the performance text, and although often regarded as a 'literary phenomenon

[17] I recently saw a performance in Athens entitled *The Dead Traveller*. It comprised two parts, based on two short stories written by Alexandros Papadiamantis, one of the most important Greek novelists (1851-1911), who wrote in an elaborate language consisting of high katharevousa for the narrative, mingled with local dialect for the dialogical parts: *The Dead Traveller* (1909) and *The Mourning of the Seal* (1908). In the first part, the main character-narrator is the dead traveller whose body washes up on shore. The performer presents himself as a rhapsode: he mixes his narration with commentary through the use of singing and sound-making produced by voice, a guitar, as well as random objects, and with the aid of a musician whose role is confined to that of an instrument. These sounds, together with simple 'tricks' such as the occasional dimming of the lights, create a stage text that in turn transforms the short story into a theatre text, incorporating it into a solid theatrical universe (questioning Lehmann's suggestion that advanced technology is necessary in order to unite two different languages into a theatrical one). However, the second part, delivered by a female performer who appears to be a character within the narration, delivers the text as a monologue. Being a short story and not a theatre text, however, it exposed its lack of theatrical structures and mechanisms, and could not answer to fundamental questions (such as who the narrator was). Similarly to the stage poetry show described earlier, the actor's presence remained problematic,due to the fact that the text, written as a short story, did not contain a side text that could bring together the actor, the text and the stage.

whose linguistic reality vanishes on stage and makes room for a theatrical reality to emerge' (Jürs-Munby, 2009:48), the play contains within a theatrical system. But this is where their similarities end, for the play is not part of a stage text, but is written as an autonomous piece of work, and one that could have an infinite number of different stagings.

This theatrical system can be described as a side text. Marvin Carlson quotes Roman Ingarden, who observes that, 'what is most conspicuous in a written drama is the existence, side by side, of two different texts: the "side text" or stage directions – e.g. information with regard to where, at what time etc. the given represented story takes place, who exactly is speaking, and perhaps also what he is doing at a given moment, etc. – and the main text itself' (Carlson, 2009:186–7).

Obviously Ingarden is thinking in terms of the traditional dramatic play, but the side text is an important and necessary aspect of the new dramatic play as well, even when it doesn't contain any stage directions at all. The side text may include the implied spectator and the implied stage, as already discussed, and also the implied actor, in the sense of the actor's processes. The side text also includes arrangements through the punctuation marks and typography, and through the use of other non-verbal signs, such as beats and pauses, which structure the play internally and communicate a strong sense of direction and are, therefore, to be taken, to some extent at least, as didascaliae (just like the stage directions in the dramatic play). Carlson notes:

> To assume as Ingarden and traditional theatre semioticians have done, that the side text simply disappears, or is replaced by non written equivalents in production, is to take an overly simple view of its operations. Evidence suggests that, from the Renaissance onward, at least some of the side text was carried over into the physical productions
>
> (2009:188)

Carlson sees the theatrical text as one that is doubled, namely a main text next to a main text,

and so on. This is even truer for the new dramatic play, since its unique theatrical systems are the condition upon which the whole play is created. Besides, it is often the case in new dramatic plays that the line between the text to be spoken and the side text is blurred: for instance, there are plays that include short texts of narration in the place of stage directions. These can be incorporated into the text to be spoken, or they can be presented as literature in surtitles, or they can be transformed into a visual reality – or they can simply be ignored. The side text often appears as complex as the spoken text itself: it poses difficulties as to how it is to be understood, or what its function really is. This opens up the play to multiple interpretations, for its side text does not deal with an actual stage, as the performance text does, but with the concept of the stage. In other words, it deals with theatricality.

'In the very process of writing must enter the interpretation, the performance, in short, the theatricality of the text', write Tonelli and Hubert (1979:85–6), who understand the text as a composition characterized by a double movement, namely that of inscription (the text) and transcription (interpretative performance). According to Tonelli and Hubert:

> Textual theatricality inheres primarily in a rhythm moving like a pendulum between elusion and illusion, as though to avoid the fixed verbal representation of events and create or embody another, verbal, illusion which tends to comment on and analyze the very being of the characters, thereby attaining a deeper theatricality.
>
> (ibid.)

Dramatic awareness, therefore, manifests itself as a structuring tension. More than anything, it is about the ontological core of dramatic discourse.

The distinction between text that is written as theatre and text that is used for theatre or performance has, however, been surprisingly understated. For instance, Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic theatre does not offer any distinction between play and devised text, nor between text written as theatre and text used in theatre. While in his book *The Postdramatic*

Theory, he labels as postdramatic plays by Heiner Müller, Elfriede Jelinek, Sarah Kane (especially *4.48 Psychosis* and *Crave*) and Martin Crimp (for example, *Attempts on Her Life*, *Fewer Emergencies*), he does not distinguish them from text produced during rehearsals by devising companies such as the Rimini Protokoll (Lehmann, 2006:6). Lehmann's argument is that the written text doesn't have priority over the other elements of the performance, such as lighting or set design. It is, rather, understood as no more than linguistic material. Following his argument, it would be indeed difficult to speak with conviction about the difference between a play and the telephone book, if the latter is used in performance.

Whether or not Lehmann aligns dramatic with text-based practice and post-dramatic with non-text-based practice seems rather vague in *The Postdramatic Theatre*. Liz Tomlin argues that, 'his conclusions, inconclusive as they are, are ultimately more likely to consolidate than to fracture this binary' (2009:57). Elsewhere, Lehmann defines every text as linguistic material (2006:85), therefore making clear that, 'the word postdramatic describes aesthetics and styles of theatre practice, and it thematizes writing, written drama or theatre text only in a marginal way. There is postdramatic theatre made with dramatic texts, in fact with all kinds of texts' (2011:331). But it is precisely the absence of any distinction between plays and other texts that allows him to speak of the text as linguistic material so unproblematically in his theory of the postdramatic theatre.

We could assume, for now, that Lehmann is right and that the text, either a play or text devised during rehearsals, or any text that is used in theatre, is material for the stage. Although we can certainly distinguish between theatre that gives priority to the text and theatre in which the text is just an element of the performance, and perhaps a less important one, the text does not have an autonomous existence on the stage, but it is being represented: what we see and hear on the stage is, to some extent, an interpretation of the play, performed by specific bodies and voices; we don't have the play itself, even if every word has been accurately delivered by the actors. The simple fact that the play is cut off from its textual presentation, from its typography, affirms that it can never exist as it is on the

stage. Still, the word ‘material’ describes the relationship between the play and its staging. It says absolutely nothing about the play itself. Lehmann fails to acknowledge the play for what it is, namely an autonomous composition, a work in its own right.

Surely the idea that the play is some sort of material that can never fully exist before it has been actualized on the stage is an old one. Jean-Pierre Sarrazac (2003:66) reminds us of Hegel who saw the actor as one, ‘who, through his/her mimicry and silent actions, fills in the gaps in a text which, in itself remained unfinished’, and moves on to Henri Gouhier, who thought of performance not as an added bonus but as an end in itself: ‘an accomplishment, the moment during which drama finally reaches completion’. And also Dort, who delineated ‘the birth and development of the modern concept of an open, incomplete, dramatic text awaiting its staging’ (ibid.). The notion of the play as fundamentally incomplete is also to be found in writings by Alain Badiou, who claims that, ‘the text’s staging or mise-en-scène is not an interpretation but a fulfilment’.

All these viewpoints, however, imply a teleological understanding of the relationship between text and performance, in which the latter is the end of the former – which, especially for poststructuralists such as Dort and Barthes, is undoubtedly a strange place to be. And if we follow Badiou on his suggestion, we then, necessarily, have to ask: should all stagings be considered a fulfilment of the text or are some stagings more of a fulfilment than others? And what would the criteria be?

Sarrazac, on the other hand, aims to defend the play, and so he comes to the rescue by proposing that, being the only element that no longer exists in its original form in the performative event, the play, ‘transforms, metamorphoses and virtually dispels itself through its very manifestation’, and that, in doing this, ‘the text is much more pervasive on the minds of the spectators than any other element present on stage’ (2003:68). And, although Sarrazac (similarly to Dort and Barthes) is ultimately in favour of the idea of an alliance between the

text, the stage and the spectator, by suggesting that the play is internally in a process of 'becoming' ('devenir'), he renders it dependable from the stage (and the spectator) and denies it as an autonomous entity. Sarrazac's alliance, then, does not imply equal partners, for it ultimately ties the play to its staging; it erases the distinction between the play and the performance text; it leaves the play vulnerable to be considered as a score.[18]

The idea of the play as score again signals a linear, teleological way of thinking, in which a sense of closure is necessary. But even if we accept teleology and define an end for all things, clearly the relationship described above between text and performance cannot hold, for the simple reason that they don't belong to the same ontological category, and thus one cannot be the end of the other. Besides, the play cannot be a score for one additional reason: it has many audiences, and with each of its audiences the play is 'fulfilled' in a different sense. For the reader, for instance, who finds the act of reading plays fulfilling enough and cares very little about watching them performed on stage, the play is 'fulfilled' in an imagined performance.

The first draft of what is now entitled FIVE in my play *Lucas and Time* was originally written in the form of a prose poem, long before the play existed. It was written in the first person, part of a longer piece (which ended up in the rubbish bin).

Entering the universe of *Lucas and Time* – the first four parts of the play were already written – meant that the single voice of the first draft would necessarily, given the internal structure and logic of the play, split in two: two voices, named Evi and Vivi, neither of them displaying the (ethical, psychological, physical) attributes we would perhaps expect from a theatrical

[18] The performance text could perhaps be perceived as a score, especially since, as an individual thing, it has no audience other than its creators. Separated from their stage text, performance texts often seem highly technical and difficult to comprehend.

character. What sort of characters are they, then? I think of them as voices. 'Speakers' or 'text bearers' are possible terms as well: but, apart from being clearly associated with the postdramatic theatre,[19] they also carry within them the implication that their role is to deliver a text that is external to them, thus rendering them expendable and replaceable.

On the contrary, these voices belong to the text: they generate the text and are generated by the text, in a circular movement that feeds itself as it goes along without allowing us to break it down into parts, or isolate its elements, or speak with certainty about how its conventions work. Their names, Evi and Vivi, are associated through sound, as one echoes the other – and so do their narrations as the scene moves forward. There is no linear story to be put together: no story will make sense if the dots are united, as it often happens with plays that make use of fragmentary structures. There are no dots to be united. This means that FIVE cannot be narrated: it is particularly hard to say what happens in it, or what it is all about.

Technically speaking, in FIVE we find two speaking figures, while a third figure, Lucas, exists in their discourse and sometimes appears to be almost as present as they are. Lucas is present simply because the speaking figures assure us that he is right there in front of us, performing a show of magic tricks. The text creates the impression of polyphony, which is achieved through rhythm, sound associations and repetition, but also through contradictions: there is more than one account of a story present; there is more than one version of time. These contradictions cannot be resolved and there can be no winning side. No intervention can resolve the debate, definitely not on the part of the writer, because any authorial voice is dependent on a knowing and non-contradictory truth. In this scene we find no such thing. Rather, we find a universe that works solely in terms of its own theatricality.

And thus, the passing on of the original text to the speaking figures meant the deconstruction of the (fictional) experience of the individual author and its rearrangement around the

[19] As used by Hans-Thies Lehmann, Gerda Poschmann and others.

polyphony of the play and the contradictions it involves. The result is a plural text, a text that contains various points of entry into it, none of them privileged. It means that only through this plurality can meaning be produced.

The unmaking of the single perspective of the original text, which relied on a (fictional) memory mechanism, allowed the stories it contained to scatter in past, present and future. Now, the memory mechanism of the original text is demolished and replaced with a different model, which involves the play as a whole: its logic, its structures, its techniques, its rhythms, its constructions of time. Meaning-making is inevitably related to the stimulation of our memory of the play itself. Because we have spotted, for instance, that contradiction is one of the conditions of the narrative in one part, we can remember and identify it later on in another scene, and this will help us make meaning of the play as a composition. A text that is plural is not one that makes itself flexible in order to accommodate all sorts of approaches, but one that presents us with a range of possibilities that derive from its own mechanisms. Any interpretive approach of FIVE, for instance, has to consider the fluidity of time.

Time: past, present and future, and their constant overlapping or exchanging, or melting together. The speaking figures move through time, swapping positions between them, and between them and Lucas creating a fluid universe that narrates its own theatricality. And there are other aspects of conflicting time too, such as devices and techniques of time manipulation, the most obvious being the use of the wall clock that chimes a different hour every time, moving forwards and backwards, creating urgency and then destroying it, limiting time and extending time. There is tempo, too, that draws attention to time by making things faster, slower, more frequent. There is the employment of lists, drop lines, antiphonal dialogue and repetitions as well as rhythm. There is the duration of the scene, and the duration of the scene within the play. There is metaphorical time and real time, all of them creating an autonomous temporal order that denies linear time.

Tonelli and Humbert, discussing the phenomenon of suspended time in dramatic writing, observe that it, 'puts into focus the game of elusion and illusion as the fundamental rhythm of drama. Theatricality, therefore, becomes inseparable from rhythm in as much as elusion/illusion functions as the poles between which moves dramaturgic awareness. From this perspective, elusion/illusion constitutes the theoretical basis of theatricality, bringing into full view all aspects of the text. Dramatic writing thus falls back upon itself as to perpetuate its own rhythmic origins: through suspended time, it produces the illusion of its own theatricality in anticipation of any performance' (Tonelli and Hubert, 1979:83).

I understand FIVE as a text-spectacle, in the sense that its form is also its content, while its logic is produced internally in the text, creating a universe that is purely theatrical, in the lack of any other reality. The speaking figures are also spectators in a show that takes place as text – or, better, the voices create the text of which they are spectators. This sort of text is aware that it is a theatrical text, and that it can exist only as such. It doesn't aim to absorb the real, but, to borrow Sarrazac's words, it is 'a kind of *in vitro* space, a space under vacuum where experiments about the real might be conducted according to the sole criteria of theatricality' (2002:60).

FIVE finishes with the speaking figures asking for Lucas, who, by their own admission, is in front of them performing a show of magic tricks. In fact, everyone's existence is, throughout the whole text, dependent on confirmation from the other figures. How else could these voices manage their own fluidity? As they are not fixed entities and cannot be pinned down as characters, they are anything but self-evident; rather, they are a process that begins with words, and they can only hang on for as long as there are words to be said. Inevitably, then, Lucas's inability to answer back, which confirms his disappearance, also confirms their own disappearance, their own annihilation. These voices are made of words and will inevitably expire when the words expire. And, perhaps, this is where their tragic character is located.

Similarly, in their analysis of certain dramatic texts such as *Richard III*, Tonelli and Hubert note: 'It is this knowledge which gives them a tragic identity, not because they represent a tragic destiny of which they are perfectly aware, but because they represent their theatrical awareness as tragic. Their existence is a rhetorical one and will inevitably die as they pronounce the very words, the very text which create them' (1979:82).

Another play with the word 'time' in its title is *Old Times*[20].

There is something extraordinary in Harold Pinter's *Old Times*: character and time are twisted together in such a way that we can only access the figures through their ambiguous past, which feels as though it is invented in the moment they speak.

'The first principle of character development is to make sure that they are properly introduced, and the second is to show them doing things', writes David Edgar (2009: 47). *Old Times*, written in 1971, seems as if it were created to mock such suggestions. The play does begin with a somewhat 'proper' introduction of the characters, since from the opening scene we are led to understand that Kate and Deeley are a couple, while Anna is Kate's roommate of twenty years ago, coming over for a visit. There is, however, one confusing detail: Anna is expected to arrive shortly, whereas Anna is in fact already in the room.

And there go our proper introductions. Anna is revealed, in this first instance, both as a ghost, invisible to the others, and also, from the moment she suddenly jumps into the middle of the scene, a living and breathing character. And what Anna goes on to say contradicts everything we know so far about Kate and her past. The moment Anna jumps in is not random either. She does it the exact moment Deeley says that the past does not matter: as if she were

[20] This analysis is based on an essay I wrote during my MPhil in playwriting at Birmingham University.

determined to prove him wrong, Anna interrupts him with a story from her past with Kate. Her story, vivid and showy as it is, has a strange effect on our perception of time. Even though we know that the story happened in the past, it gives us the impression of the present, while the present itself is suddenly regarded by all as 'silence'.

What follows is an exchange of roles: Kate assumes the role of the ghost, while the others refuse to acknowledge her presence. Pinter creates a universe of a cyclical movement of time, where Anna has taken Kate's place in the present and Kate is pushed back into the past. He also uses singing as a technique for extending time, with popular songs of the past taking over the present. Ironically, the song contest between Anna and Deeley finishes with the line 'How the ghost of you clings', sung by Deeley. The scene climaxes with Kate stating that she is being treated as dead. Kate uses the word 'dead' literally but the others place it in the past and give it a metaphorical meaning. (KATE You talk of me as if I were dead. / ANNA No, no, you weren't dead, you were so lively, so animated, you used to laugh.)

We, the spectators, become witnesses of an intense antagonism between the characters, as both Deeley and Anna claim Kate. Pinter plays with gender stereotypes when he puts Deeley playing an absurd role (he is Orson Welles), forcing himself upon Anna, with reference to her villa in Italy and her sophisticated though old-fashioned language, casting her in a role of a snob, while referring to Kate as his 'little wife'. As Ganz notes, Deeley 'asserts his power and masculinity by telling stories in which he possesses these qualities and in which women appear as degraded or subservient creatures' (1972:171). This is reinforced by the physical descriptions Pinter gives of both women (particularly obviously in the scenes involving underwear and Kate's bath).

And then, it is Deeley's turn to become the ghost, with an immediate impact on time: we suddenly find Kate and Anna living together as flatmates in a period when Deeley did not yet exist in their lives. But this time we are not faced with a memory but with present time. The

past has taken over, has swallowed the present – or what we knew as the present – and has taken its place. Deeley is defeated by simply being displaced. Clearly there is fluidity in the relationship between the characters and it is evident that, 'not only does each character relate to the other two in a slightly different way and to him or herself in yet a third, but the relationships are never static – no sooner is one formed, defined, nailed down than it immediately shifts slightly' (Prentice, 2000:186).

At the beginning of Act Two, there is again something unsettling about time, which has now to do with the fact that, while Kate is having a bath, Deeley is acknowledged by Anna as Kate's husband, but at the same time Anna is acting as Kate's flatmate. We are invited into a new perception of time: while time is restored as linear, it also looks like the product of an agreement between the rivals. Both realities exist, so do both characters, and they share the present – and Kate. Present and past have melted in one single reality. Not surprisingly, Deeley now remembers that he had met Anna in the past (even though she is not willing to accept this at first) and he even knows Anna and Kate's friends from their past – who are now their friends in the present.

Deeley and Anna appear as if in mutual agreement to continue the battle in a more civilized manner. In this new reality, however, Kate is determined to have the upper hand. The tempo accelerates in this scene and Kate's drop line to Anna ('I remember you dead') brings Anna once again to the role of the ghost. Anna remains in the room, but, exactly as in her first appearance, she is also absent. Deeley is reduced to the man who was sobbing in the room in Anna's story.

Time changes again. We are now in the past, where Kate and Deeley first got together (or when Deeley first replaced Anna) but we experience it as the present. The future, which is what we first got to know as present, namely Deeley and Kate as a married couple, is disregarded as trivial: 'He suggested a wedding instead, and a change of environment.

Neither mattered', says Kate, echoing Deeley in the opening scene of the play – and, in this way, Pinter has made sure that the question of what has really happened not only cannot be answered, but, in fact, does not matter at all.

In Milan Kundera's *La fête de l'insignificance* (2014), Charles is completely taken by a story from Khrushchev's memoirs, which involves Stalin partridge-hunting, and decides to turn it into a puppet theatre script. 'For, if the story of Stalin and Khrushchev is played by human actors, it will be a fraud. Nobody has the right to pretend to give life to a human being that doesn't exist anymore. Nobody has the right to make a human being out of a marionette', Charles explains.

The references to historical figures found in *Ajax for Instance* turn into speaking figures, theatrical inventions, cogs in the fragmented, violent universe of *Germania 3*.[21] And if, in the poem, they are nothing but shadows burdened by their historical signification, chained to Müller's emotion and deprived of language, here they break loose and demand to be treated like any other speaking figure of the play: that is, to be rediscovered as marionettes of a machine which blends together facts and pseudo-facts, archetypes and political manifestos, cultural patterns and national myths, accounts of pain and hate speeches sparked by the instinct of death.

But if Stalin is given a voice – beautiful, poetic, mad – other famous figures from history and fiction that appear in the poem have now been erased (or left to be consumed by the

[21] *Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man* (*Germania 3 Gespenster am Toten Mann*) is Heiner Müller's last play. Müller planned to start rehearsing it at the Berliner Ensemble on 15 January 1996 but he died two weeks before the beginning of the rehearsals. The play, which, according to Weber, does not necessarily constitute a final draft as Müller often changed his texts during the work with the actors (Weber, 2001), consists of various scenes: Müller's writing is mixed with folk tales and songs, as well as extracts by other writers. In *Germania 3* we find texts by Bertolt Brecht, Heinrich von Kleist, Friedrich Hölderlin, Franz Kafka, and even parts from Müller's previous plays, such as *Philoctetes*. The first *Germania Death in Berlin* was written twenty-five years earlier. There is no *Germania 2*.

machine). Most of all, Ajax. In *Ajax for Instance*, Müller identifies with Sophocles' ill-fated hero in order to bring his references and images together into a single train of thought; Ajax is the vehicle through which Müller conveys his feelings of anguish and disgust about his own times. Ajax is Müller, and Müller is the main character of the poem. But in *Germania 3,* Müller's words are scattered in the mouths of a number of different figures.

The writer is dispersed in all of them: there is no Ajax, and, in this sense, there is no Müller either. Müller breaks into a multiplicity of voices, which overflow the dramatic form: literature, history and culture become a muddy cluster carried away by the flow. The image of the man hanged from a hook on the wall returns, but now blood stains every scene of the play. Macbeth's axe passes on to various hands. Classic texts of the German literature by Kleist, Brecht and Hölderlin are appropriated and thrown into the midst of the slaughtering. The blows of the axe bring about the cracking of forms and the emergence of new configurations.

'The breakdown or distortion of models/orders (defined as forms of drama, literary works, literary and historical characters, or quotations) essential to the author's project or entropy is not purely deconstructive but creates a new ordering' (Teraoka, 1988:179). Indeed, Müller's new dramatic form is a machine that puts into action a number of theatrical stages, tangled up in a process of consuming one another, while its marionette-characters try desperately to escape; yet it is only in the insides of this theatre-machine that they can exist.

In *Ajax for Instance*, we follow the stream of consciousness of the poet, ourselves holding an external position, that of the observer. This is because the references and images created are part of the imaginary of the speaking character, who is Müller himself, and they cannot be separated from it. They already contain within them Müller's own comment, which guides us in how to read the poem. And if Müller understands himself as Ajax, so do we, through him.

But in *Germania 3* there are no obvious answers. Now it is the spectator's responsibility to find their place within the play; meaning is something the spectator has to work out for themselves. Our position, as spectators, is not a given in the play, but involves a process that may also be felt like a struggle, or a challenge: it is a game but one that has consequences for us, as we may end up questioning our very position in the world. This also means that in our encounter with the text nothing is predetermined, nothing can be taken for granted. Whether the spectator will come to identify with Ajax, just like the writer does in the poem, or not, depends solely on the spectator and the answers he/she will come up with. 'I believe in conflicts', says Heiner Müller. 'Only in them. This is what I want to achieve with my work: to strengthen the conscious mind for conflicts and contradictions. There is no other way. Answers and solutions are of no interest to me' (Staatsman, 2009:62)

In Staatsman's words, Müller's strategy aims to create 'a space for ambiguity and contradiction, which forces the spectator to take a stand […] If they decide to avoid the tension, they will have to see themselves as fugitives; and if they accept it, they necessarily participate in dealing with it' (ibid.).

To take a stand, though, is anything but simple, for the roles of the speaking figures in the play keep changing, just as the axe keeps changing hands, and so the murderer becomes victim and the innocent becomes guilty, in a movement that seems to have no beginning and no end. As Kalb observes, 'the characters are given substantial, self-justifying monologues in which they describe themselves as reflections and conditions of one another' (1998:54).

In this process, this exchangeability reflects back to the spectators, who may find that taking a stand is not a simple task. This is the game of *Germania 3,* which, by stretching the limits of reason and constructing multiple positions for the audience, proves itself to be a text for theatre, for here there is risk. But this also means that there is hope: *Germania 3* may be Müller's bleakest text, yet the dramatic form itself cannot refuse a sense of faith and trust in

humanity, which certainly didn't exist for the writer of *Ajax for Instance*.

In an interview on his work *Go down, Moses*, which deals with a theological problem, namely the absence of God and the absence of hope, Romeo Castellucci said:

> There is nothing in front of us, just a vacuum. Hope is always desperation. I have no hope, and I cannot speak of something I don't have. If someone gives me hope, I know it will be fake, an illusion. I don't think that Moses had hope either. He was just someone who did things. […] Tragedy, which is the highest aesthetic form that ever existed and will ever exist, begins at the moment we lose hope. If there was hope, there wouldn't be tragedy
>
> (Castellucci, 2015)

For Müller, too, tragedy begins when hope is lost. *Ajax for Instance* speaks of Müller's conviction that he could not but follow Ajax's path, the annihilation of self. In Müller's case, the end doesn't even include a sword: it is the death of a nameless man, who 'trampled with his feet the image of the dead dictator and hanged himself from the now available hood'.

But if tragedy begins in the absence of hope, it is only to restore it. It is the act of natality – to use Hannah Arendt's term – itself that ensures this, in this case not in relation to the actual fact that human beings are constantly being born in the world, but in its second meaning as political natality, which, according to Arendt, is 'a response to and a confirmation of our first birth to the extent that we freely insert ourselves into the plurality of the world through distinctive action and speech' (1958:83). The single voice of *Ajax for Instance* dissolves in a multiplication of voices, in a polyphony in which the spectator is asked to abandon his role as an observer and respond.

Action and speech are the materials of tragedy. Action is the definition of drama, and it is thus no surprise that Aristotle suggests in his *Poetics* that there can be tragedy without characters but not without action. The theatre text performs. *Germania 3* does things, as Moses does

things. (And so does Castellucci with his theatre. In the end of my interview with him, he admitted: ‘I’m not convinced that theatre is necessary in order to live better. But when I finish a work, I feel that I have just lost something’ [Castellucci, 2015]. Could that be hope?)

In new dramatic plays, action and speech often merge into one. Thus action is about the way the structures and elements of the play interact with one another, and the consequences these interactions have. Action is revealed through the cracking of the traditional forms and their reshaping into new dynamic formations. In *Germania 3,* we find the organizing principles of the text in a game of absence and presence: it is Brecht’s three widows and their constant chatter about him, and the chatter of the workers that measure his coffin, and the chatter of ghosts, and again the chatter of his widows, and then Brecht has no choice but to actually turn up, as BRECHT’S VOICE (whose finishing lines echo those of Müller in *Ajax for Instance*: ‘I want to be / Forgotten by all a trace in the sand’).

In a previous part of *Germania 3* entitled *The Working Guest*, an SS man is asked by three widows (not Brecht’s) to kill them. They observe that, ‘he looks like a peasant’. ‘The peasant has found an axe, a peasant’s weapon. It’ll do the job fast, you want it to be fast, won’t you, and I’m in a hurry’, SS MAN answers back. What follows is CROATIAN’s monologue: a man who works in Germany and returns to his Croatian village, wife and children. He has left his suit and tie in his car, and he is dressed in his former peasant clothes. He slaughters his family with an axe; he then puts his suit back on, and his tie, and drives back to Germany. The insult of the three widows to the SS MAN in the previous scene has now been avenged.

Subsequent action in the play has to do with the aesthetic representation of pain and suffering. Denise Varney suggests that looking into the discursive practices of the text will make us realize that its speech acts are, in fact, a re-staging of the hate speeches of historical figures such as Hitler. And thus, Hitler’s monologue ‘enacts a verbal assault on the implied listener who is the despised unrepresented collective of the times’ (Varney, 2003: 7).

By transforming these hate speeches and acts into performative acts, *Germania 3* allows us to identify them and respond. The theatre text doesn't only acknowledge suffering, but it also actively protests against it, by mapping a space for resistance. The theatre text is a space of action; not only does it indices action, it also demands it. There is a clear answer here as to what it means to be a spectator.

What becomes obvious by juxtaposing the two texts *Ajax for Instance* and *Germania 3* is that they work in very different ways. The poem incorporates the images and references that emerge in a fluid, uninterrupted stream of consciousness. In the play, however, we see an incredible number of references, parts from Müller's other works as well as texts of other writers, all thrown into the theatrical universe of *Germania 3*: a theatre-machine that creates within it a series of stages that hold all those different parts together and put them into motion, each working with or against the other parts, drawing our attention not just to the familiarity of forms and ideas but also to their differences. However, in the workings of this theatre-machine, everything is being transformed, creating a single universe. As Kalb notes (1998), Müller, alongside other German authors, reflects on historical syndromes while creating a spectacle of German literature feeding on itself.

Germania 3 is a text-spectacle: a text that acts but does not explain, a text that performs and stays open to plural meanings, and, most of all, a text that creates the eye that looks at it, the reader, and the spectator.

VOICE OF BRECHT (which rewrites a well-known poem by Brecht called *I don't need a tombstone / Ich benötige keinen Grabstein*) poses an interesting challenge:

> But they will say of me He

Has made proposals We have not
Adopted them Why should we
That shall be written on my tombstone and
The birds shall shit on it and
The grass shall grow over my name
That is written on the tombstone I want to be
Forgotten by all a trace in the sand.

Perhaps Weber would again assume that 'the text ends with the conclusion that the act of writing itself may have become useless.' Barthes, however, would most probably disagree and say that 'only when the author enters into his own death, writing begins.' And the image of a nameless tombstone shat on by the birds, as given by Müller, illustrates Barthes's suggestion quite powerfully.

In the previous section, I read the line as 'I want to be/ Forgotten by all a trace in the sand'. But now, looking at it again, I think that this little phrase, 'I want to be', stands on its own, separated by the rest. Therefore, this time I read:

I want to be
(but I'm) Forgotten by all a trace in the sand.

Or, better:

I want to be
That is written on the tombstone
Forgotten by all a trace in the sand.

I imagine that Barthes would probably stick to his guns, though. 'Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of

the body writing', he argues in *The Death of the Author* (Barthes, 1977:142). Barthes claims that the dissolution of the author is a precondition for the writing to exist. Although one could also argue that the dissolution of the author is an end in itself for Barthes.

More specifically, in *The Death of the Author*, Barthes presents three main positions. The first is that only by expelling the author (who is a human person driven by their need for self-expression), the text will be liberated from a single 'theological' meaning imposed in it. Second, it is the language who speaks, not the author. It is the language that acts, performs. Language is not an instrument but the creator. Third, the death of the author is the precondition whereby the reader can emerge.

The first position clearly identifies the author with the human person. But, surely, this idea is awkward: for the human person is a source of material for the author. The human person (his/her life, experience, expectations, perception of the world) is material that can be used, abused, manipulated, exposed, questioned, endorsed or laughed at. In the hands of the author, the human person can be demolished and reconstructed in an infinite number of ways. I understand the author as a machine, exactly like the text itself. What we, as readers, recognize in the works of any author is the internal mechanism of the machine: the way it functions, how it connects things together; the specific uses of language, the voice or voices it contains; the landscape of ideas and themes and obsessions, which we sometimes identify as the author's politics. And those may coincide with the political views held by the human person. But there is always between them a distance which can never be erased. The way the text-machine works may reveal far more for the politics of the author-machine than the views of the human person, which hints at the fact that the consciousness of the author and the consciousness of the human person are not the same thing.

Thus we read the works of the author Heiner Müller and recognize the machine,[22] and we become fascinated by it even if our own interest in Müller as a person – who once lived in a place called East Germany and has been dead for more than two decades – has faded. Besides, this interest in the human person is something Heiner Müller himself always mocked, by giving contradictory answers in his various interviews about his own thoughts and beliefs. Perhaps this, for him, was a way to separate the author from the human person and let us know that we, the readers, should only try to understand the second. Or, perhaps, to remind us that the human person is also a fiction. By using the human person as material, the author shows it for what it is: a construction, a made-up thing, a narrative. This is what Müller struggles to liberate himself from. The final programme is the invention of silence: Müller is dissolved in a multiplicity of voices and thus finally liberated from the fiction of who he is supposed to be.

Barthes's view of language as the creator of the text also poses problems, as it seems to imply a dominant superstructure that is there to replace the God-Author who Barthes himself criticizes. Of course, texts are produced in the processes of language and communicate with each other (even behind the authors' back). However, the author, the text and language go together, all of them creators and instruments. And if language, and thus writing, is the creation of a space, or of a stage on which things perform, so is the author. Writing doesn't just appear in an empty space. It interacts with various conditions and limitations, and in some ways writing is the struggle against those limitations.

The limitations of language, for instance, are obvious when one is dealing with issues of translation. 'You are dead to me', says C, in the opening line of Sarah Kane's *Crave*. Who is C talking to? It could be a man or a woman or a number of people. It could be the whole human race for all we know. But this ambiguity is lost in other languages: in many European ones, the phrase would necessarily include the gender and a singular or plural form. 'Tu es

[22] Müller of course himself was very interested in the function of the text-machine, having written *Hamletmachine* (*Die Hamletmaschine*).

morte pour moi': there, immediately for the French reader and spectator, the gender and singular form would limit the possibilities of whom C is talking to. It could be either M, the only other female character present, or an absent female character (and we are then waiting to confirm one of these two possibilities). It's the Same with the Greek translation: 'Είσαι νεκρή για μένα' reveals gender and singular form both in its written and verbal instance.

In the fifth part of *Lucas and Time* there is a similar problem. The characters Evi and Vivi speak about Lucas in the third person, but towards the end of the scene, the address switches to the second person, which creates a new possibility: the addressee is either Lucas or the other speaking figure, namely Evi or Vivi. Perhaps it was written with the intention to play with ambiguity, or it was an accident I only noticed later on (I honestly can't remember). But allowing both possibilities to co-exist in the text only works in the original English version: in the Greek, German and French translations, a decision had to be made, and so it was decided that the addressee was Lucas. Therefore, in these languages, one of the possibilities was cut off simply because it could not be accommodated by them.

Another example is the letter, mentioned in different parts in the play, including the fifth: in English the word 'letter' is used to denote a 'written, typed or printed communication, sent in an envelope by post or messenger', and also 'a character representing any of the symbols of an alphabet'. In SEVEN, the word is used with both these meanings simultaneously: 'letter' refers to the guessing game played by the guests and also to the letter sent by the host. And this echoes all the previous occasions in the play in which a letter was mentioned. It was, thus, particularly important to keep both meanings. And this could work in English, Greek and French, but not in German, in which language the word for these two meanings is different. In order to solve this problem, I asked the German translator to retain both meanings by using both, separate, words.

However, it seems that Barthes speaks of the death of the author in relation to what he understands as the language of representation. ‘This is why the death of the author need never be raised in connection with writerly texts, why Barthes does not explain what purpose authorial extirpation might serve in the cases of Genet, the later Joyce, Proust, Bataille and others’, notes Burke (2008:47), who explains that ‘anti-authorialism has always found itself in complicity with anti-representational poetics’ (ibid.:42). It is in representational aesthetics that the language is devalued to being a tool that is used to describe the world, which is perceived as a given reality.

3.
Improvisations, Narratives

And so I'm writing a scene in which –

two women are bound together in a tedious coexistence while time has slowed down. Or perhaps there is no such thing as time: there is only the endless repetition of chores and habits and a few small pleasures like chess-playing or poetry-reading. Or perhaps all attempts at liveness have long dried out of joy: the chess games end up with the pieces knocked over and scattered all over the floor, while poetry –

I glimpse at my bookshelves. I examine the titles. I pull out a volume. It's Ted Hughes' *Birthday Letters*. On page 7 I read:

> Lucas, my friend, one
> Among those three or four who stay unchanged
> Like a separate self,
> A stone in the bed of the river
> Under every change, became your friend.

The poem's title is *Visit*. It is a rather long one, a whole two-and-a-half pages, but I'm only interested in the opening lines. At this point, I have no idea what Ted Hughes is talking about; it is the name 'Lucas' that catches my attention. And thus, in my scene: Woman repeats the above lines; she is anxious to remember the rest of the poem, but her memory fails every time. She keeps asking Nurse to read the poem to her, but the latter always refuses. Nurse's indifference, as well as Woman's obsession with a letter that was supposedly stolen from her

drawer, invites some doubt as to whether the poem really exists. It could be that the above lines are Woman's own fabrication and Lucas is someone from her past, someone who once sent her a letter.

So far I have a few stolen lines, a series of fragmented scenes between two women, some of which are repeated again and again, as if playing on a loop. Canned food. Old age. A sense of confinement. Nonsensical talk. Mirroring effects. Next, I write a monologue. The narrator is a young woman who tells the story of a picnic under the bright sunlight, food and wine, a river, a man called –

Lucas. I steal the name Lucas from Ted Hughes' poem. My own uncertainty over the identity of Lucas in Hughes' poem blends with the uncertainty created in the scene with Woman and Nurse in relation to the poem and the letter. This new scene, which I now place at the beginning of the play, does not attempt to resolve any of these uncertainties but rather to enhance them. Uncertainty becomes the driving force of the play. The letter returns but this time it is a letter written by the narrator to Lucas and it is hidden inside the picnic basket, while we, as audience, never hear its content.

I imagine that the reader, or the spectator, inevitably would try at this point to link these two parts, with the two versions of Lucas and the two versions of the letter, and come up with an imagining in the direction of coherence or connection. Other things in these two parts also imply a connection between them – as, for instance, an identical piece of dialogue repeated in both of them by two different characters. And thus the audience could feel encouraged to think of ONE and TWO as past and present, and of these two characters as one. But the attempt to link them in any temporal or causal order would be short-lived, for what drives this work already is the idea of a large stage, so to speak, in which various things perform, and in which links and bridges between scenes and chapters are created, holding the individual stories together, but only momentarily: going back to a place, a name, an image, a piece of

dialogue doesn't necessarily mean going back to what we already know.

And I now return to Ted Hughes' poem and read it again. This time I realize that Lucas must be a real person, whose friendship the poet shared with Silvia Plath. An online search confirms it: it is Lucas Myers, who became friends with Ted Hughes in 1955 at Cambridge University, where they were both studying, and maintained a close friendship with him until Hughes' death on 28 October 1998. Myers was also a friend of Silvia Plath's, whom he met at a party at Cambridge in 1956. Myers published his own memoir, entitled *Crow Steered/Bergs Appeared* (2001), in which he gives a detailed account of his exchanges with Hughes and Plath and offers his own perspective on their relationship.

Perhaps I wouldn't have stolen the name had I known from the beginning that the poem's Lucas was in fact a real person. (All right, I would.) At this point, however, the play is already sailing towards a direction where the real Lucas doesn't matter at all. And even if we, as the audience, identified these lines as Hughes' poem (or simply read the Notes included in the play), we would find no other way to think of the real Lucas as yet another Lucas, alongside the rest of them.

(I was surprised, however, when I went to the first rehearsal of *Lucas and Time* in Stadttheater Osnabrück – on 1 June 2016 – and found a copy of Hughes' *Birthday Letters* on the table. As that first introductory rehearsal began, the actors were asked to read the poem, even before they read the play. And it seemed to me that, even though the dramaturg and the rest of the creative team had found no relation between my play and Hughes' poem other than the one I have just described, they were unwilling to accept the randomness implied by the simple act of stealing a name and a few lines from a poem. By starting with the reading of the poem, they were professing a connection between the play and the poem through content, even if they themselves had found none. This was because randomness felt, I assume, unsafe. Or, perhaps, it wasn't just the random that disturbed: perhaps it was some

sort of reassurance that the play was indeed referring 'back' to something, Ted Hughes' poem in this case, rather than improvising into the as yet unestablished.)

On second thoughts, I rephrase: maybe the discovery that Lucas in Hughes' poem is in fact Lucas Meyers does have some impact. My reading of the first lines of the poem already suggested a sense of antagonism between two people, each claiming Lucas as their own friend, which is now only reinforced. This 'my friend/your friend' game infects the third part of the play. In it, two narrators, Judy and Laura, compete over the telling of a story with the same protagonist, their little brother Lucas, in a process that is openly improvisational – or, better, a sort of performing improvisation. 'We told Lucas to hide', says Judy at the opening of the scene and this phrase could be, in a sense, the key phrase of the play as a whole, each time improvised in a different way throughout the seven parts.

The main idea of the improvisation in THREE comes from the previous part, when Nurse once again refuses to read the poem:

> I wish I had someone to read bedtime stories to me
> Cinderella or/
> Thumbelina or /
> Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs or /
> the Thousand and One Nights or /
> Sweeney Todd

THREE, therefore, develops as an improvisation of a fairytale. Lucas is a small boy with soft curls and round cheeks who looks like a girl; a boy who keeps drawings of cats and fish under his bed, and who goes into hiding to escape Father's punishment; a boy who runs into a haunted house and disappears in the dark. Father, on the other hand, is conjured up as a fuming beast, monstrous and irrational – in other words, an 'ogre': a large, hideous, manlike monster that devours small kids.

At this point I'm flirting with the idea of creating a play whose various parts can be rearranged in many possible combinations, making distinct variations of the play. But clearly the rule for the improvisations I have just come up with, namely that each improvisation is triggered by something from the previous part, goes against that (indeed, the structure of the piece as a whole, as it developed, rules out completely the idea of changing the position of these parts.)

And so, each chapter contains seeds to be picked up in the next, while some of these seeds are going to be picked up in all parts of the play: ONE and TWO are connected through the name Lucas (which is also a connecting link between all chapters of the play but the last one, in which Lucas is the implied host of the party although the name is never actually mentioned – and the host never actually appears), the reference to a letter, the abundance or lack of food, or appetite, the identical pieces of dialogue. TWO and THREE are linked through fairytales, the latter as a realization of the former, and also via some details such as the cupboards with the dusty cans, identical in both stories. In addition, THREE refers back to ONE and to the idea of improvisation, first mentioned explicitly there. And from the moment the word is said, it is certain that improvisation is now a seed to be picked up later. And this takes place in THREE, while FOUR –

opens with two speaking figures, Kora and Elsie, who may or may not have seen a child. It is sparked off by Lucas' disappearance in the previous part (and again, details from THREE, such as the haunted house or the climbing roses, reappear here). More tales are invented but this time the techniques, as well as the intentions of the author(s), are exposed: Kora and Elsie write obituaries whose protagonist (the deceased), just like a fictional character, has to be evoked in such a way that we, the audience, can identify with. Here, fiction is to enrich reality and make meaning – or without it, we cannot gain the sense of living. And so, the lives of the deceased are imagined by the speakers as stories with beginning, middle and end, and are intended to encourage the readers/ spectators to make meaning of their own lives. And, perhaps, to gain the sense of living means also to suspend death: by reimagining the lives of

the deceased, the authors give them another breath of life, an extra few lines, pushing death further down the page. Fiction thus proves itself capable of calling off death, even if it is only temporarily, even if it is only for as long as the words last.

In FIVE, two speaking figures, Evi and Vivi, are entangled as one voice in a game of invention, memory and time, which unfolds around a new version of Lucas. This Lucas is a magician who is performing a show right before our eyes (or so we are told). The promise of performance is finally materialized here. And we, as audience, have to take the speakers' word for it: 'I see the rabbit / take it or leave it / I see the real thing', say the characters. Lucas is performing a magic show; his magic is real, but only those of us believers can actually see it.

Before typing the final lines of FIVE, I know already that SIX will be mirroring TWO but reversed: the actors who play Woman and Nurse in TWO will now swap roles. (Lucas' magic tricks have produced some tangible results.)

SIX is heavy with repetitions: the chess game, the letter, the poem, Lucas. There are echoes of the same dialogues, only this time the replies are missing. There is no answering back. Their monologues are fragmented, incomplete, cryptic. The two voices melt in one (in the opposite process than that of FIVE, where one voice splits in two, or three). Thus in SIX the play returns to the same place as it started, but slightly to the side. We already know these characters but their reality is now distorted. Maybe this swapping of roles suggests that each one of the characters is a projection of the other. But also it points to the fact that in this play the investment is not in the characters as distinct physical entities, but in them being part of a horizon of imaginings and considerations that cut through and across the play's scenes.

I also know now that the title of the play is *Lucas and Time* –

not without a hint of irony, I admit. The title chimes with Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. In it, Heidegger, who is regarded as a founder of Existentialism, engages in an exploration of what the authentic being is, which he approaches in relation to 'Dasein', a sense of 'being-in': being is time, and time is finite. It is by projecting our lives onto the horizon of our death and realizing our finitude that we become who we are. As Honderich explains, 'authentic being towards death is related to "resoluteness": it is only if I am aware of my finitude that I have reason to act now, rather than to procrastinate, and it is the crucial decision made with a view to the whole course of my future life that gives my life its unity and shape' (Honderich, 1995:347).

Lucas and Time laughs at the idea of an authentic being and instead throws in a bizarre mixture of characters present and absent, creating a fluid multiplicity of voices and engaging with time not as finite but as theatrical and thus suspended (but perhaps not infinite, for it is time that has been marked and, in experiencing it, we are also marked by it.[23] Time then becomes possibly an intimate time, or time we can possess.) There is no birth and death, neither a distinction between authenticity and fiction. Instead of action there is only movement, a coming together and a pulling apart which includes fictions and concrete things alike and turns them all into rhythm, and into a single beat which stands for what we call existence.

Moving between repetition and metamorphosis, the text not only allows actors to perform but also performs itself by exposing its internal thinking and processes and rendering them visible, even if by doing so it questions its own reliability. Its workings are not conceptual but physical, as they change the body of the text, its internal condition, and they expose it as vulnerable, for its processes, such as improvisation which I've been discussing here, both

[23] I am paraphrasing Peggy Phelan's phrase, which is about representation: 'In writing the unmarked I mark it, inevitably. In seeing it I am marked by it' (1993:27). I am also thinking of Tim Etchells' short phrases: 'Time that somehow breaks or slips under the clock. /Time as it is felt. /Long time and short time' (2000:30).

create the work and also threaten to destroy it. This movement is, for me, an engagement with the act of looking, listening, spectating. The text does not pretend to have all the answers.

Reflecting on this movement, I now come to think of this play-in-process both as a thing and as an event.[24] And thus, the last part of the play, SEVEN, develops indeed as an event. There are no characters but Voices. The text is to be distributed in any number of voices. And if the first part presented a monologue, and the following five each presented a pair of speakers, then the last one cannot be but a chorus: it is the multiplication of voices, or the dissolution of all voices into a 'we' which stands like pure rhythm and ends up as the repetitive sound of rain tapping on a window glass. In this event – a social gathering, a party in which the host remains absent – we find guessing games, questions about the nature of things and also concrete things, such as books and furniture. The repetitions create musical patterns and improvisations around the same key note, exactly as happens in the play as a whole.

A note: apart from some slight editing, the parts of the play remained as they were written in the first draft. In this sense, what THREE describes as the improvising of a story in front of an audience is in fact the method for the whole play. (Obviously, this account can also be considered as something that is improvised, in the sense of being made up spontaneously.)

Perhaps the theatre text is an event also because it takes place within a discourse.

In music, improvisation is often perceived as a vehicle for self-expression through playing with others and exploring the relationships between players, which also implies that improvisation necessarily involves the unpredictable element provided by other players that moves things

[24] Event: a thing that happens or takes place/a social occasion.

forward. It also implies a relationship with the audience: whether the audience approves what's happening or not affects the course of improvisation, as musicians are likely to repeat the things that the audience shows enthusiasm and appreciation for (Bailey, 1993:105).

It may seem, then, that writing and improvisation are mutually exclusive since the writer is creating solo; neither creative collaborators nor the audience is present to provide the unpredictable element and to lead the work through interaction, exchange, provocation. But this, I think, is a rather superficial way of thinking about the practice of playwriting, for the new dramatic play is openly responsive to its environment: it is about bringing in the work of other writers, for instance, not as influences but as a direct encounter that takes place within the text itself. This is what Heiner Müller does in *Germania 3* when he throws in various texts from various writers and sets them all to perform together, in order not to speak of the value of encounter as an ethical thing, but, on the contrary, to create a battlefield in which these texts are set against each other and are brutalized, used, abused – thus giving flesh and blood to what Müller himself experienced as war.

The new dramatic play's responsiveness is also about the way it responds to, challenges, assimilates, objects to or embodies new developments on the stage, whether these have to do with new staging technologies, a new permissiveness in dramatic content, the impact on dramatic and theatrical form of 'global' concerns, new actorly practices, new formations of stage/audience relations or the theatrical phenomenon itself. In other words, its responsiveness is about the way it admits it is theatre writing, differentiating itself from other literary genres, even when borrowing from them (or maybe especially then), or trespassing into historical dramatic forms and coming up with new formations in order to propose new temporalities – and these are some of the ways employed by the new dramatic play, to make us pay attention to what is really theatrical in the text.

The new dramatic play's responsiveness to its environment may even expose the existing

stage practices as inadequate and generate the need for new ones. An obvious example is Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life,* a play consisting of short, fragmented scenarios, which, as it happened, strained the creative imagination and technique of various practitioners. One of them is Katie Mitchell, who directed the play at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan in 1999:

> After a lot of discussion, I decided that the most fruitful way of directing the play was to imagine the cast as a group of young writers who had to improvise all the play's scenarios under pressure from an unseen force. So I encouraged the actors to work on the characters of these fictional writers rather than on the various characters who appear in the play. So they played these writers who were stuck in a building and under immense pressure to come up with the definitive improvisation about the play's central theme, which is global capitalism, and who kept failing, and then trying again, a bit like Beckett's phrase: 'Fail again, fail better'. […] For coherence, we invented these secondary characters who could improvise all the scenarios. For my taste, *Attempts on Her Life* needs this kind of coherent ruling idea. Otherwise, it can fall apart into a series of fragments that confuse the audience.
>
> (Mitchell, cited in Sierz, 2006:198–9)

Clearly, Mitchell saw the play's scenarios as in need of being somehow disciplined and put in the service of a 'coherent ruling idea': by attaching everything together into a solid story, and by creating with the actors back stories, she would make the play deliver in the way the audience is accustomed to. Otherwise, without this coherent story behind the different scenarios, regulating the relationship of the play with the audience, it would all fall apart. And while Mitchell recognized the importance of improvisation in this play, as it is obvious from the above passage where the word 'improvisation' is used quite a few times, she went on to cut it off from its real source, the play itself, and make it instead part of this coherent ruling idea: the actors perform as if they were improvising. But now we, as audience, can feel safe, for it is all part of a well thought-out directing concept and, thankfully, nobody is really improvising at all.

This approach is certainly tangled up with particular traditions of actor and director training which seem to prevail in Britain. In Mitchell's *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (2009:46, 47), she suggests that what the writer has to say about the play has to be

approached with caution, as 'there will always be a difference between the play and what the writer claims to have written'. Definitively for Martin Crimp there is no ruling idea in the play, and that's why he could tell what the play is not about rather than what it is (Sierz, 2006:103), bringing to mind Barthes' claim for the refusal of the 'single, theological point'. Mitchell would most probably find Barthes too abstract. In her advice to directors, she warns against reading literary criticism, as it 'may encourage generalization and vagueness in your thinking about the play […] Do not mistake the search for the ideas that underpin the text as a licence to return to literary criticism or engage in discursive abstract debates. The process is simpler. Most plays contain between three and four major ideas.' She then urges directors to, 'ask themselves the question "What is the play about?" and answer in simple sentences, such as "The play is about death"' (Mitchell, 2009: 46, 47). For Mitchell, then, improvisation in *Attempts on Her Life* may have some value as a theme, as one of these three or four ideas, but improvisation conceived as the heartbeat of the play probably has very little.

Nevertheless, I think that this is the idiom of the new dramatic play: an exploration of what a play is, what it can do and how it can connect with the world of theatre as well as the world in general. And if improvisation is the making of a new phrase within an idiom, as Bailey suggests (1993) then every new dramatic play is an improvisation, a trying out of possibilities and an expansion into the future.

There are quite a few plays that seem to involve improvisation in an obvious way. In my own list, for instance, I would include some plays by Martin Crimp, such as *Fewer Emergencies*, which was written in 2005 and comprises three shorter pieces, or *The City*, written in 2008, which openly follows an improvisational path: the moment something is said out loud, it then becomes a reality, although distorted and consequently repeated in many variations. *The City*, though, succumbs in the end to an overarching idea that explains it all, namely that all of the characters and situations are created in someone's diary. Improvisation has, thus, been tamed and given a dramaturgical reason outside itself.

However, as Bailey points out, improvisation can only be approached empirically: 'I couldn't imagine a meaningful consideration of improvisation from anything other than a practical and a personal point of view. For there is no general or widely held theory of improvisation and I would have thought it self-evident that improvisation has no existence outside of its practice' (Bailey, 1993: x). This, it seems to me, explains accurately my own use of the term in this thesis. While to some extent I proceed by analogy and comparison to music practices, I employ the term in the ways I describe below, and I discuss improvisation almost exclusively in terms of my own play.

1. Writing as a performance

Improvisation involves a live performance: writing occurs in the process of this performance, only it is imagined, for playwriting does not just involve the page, or does not primarily involve the page, but takes place on the (conceptual) stage. It is a text that deals with the page and the stage, the written word and the spoken word, the fictional character and the human body, all arranged under the gaze of the inner spectator. In order to write a play, I 'perform' and improvise. Perhaps, then, it is not a surprise that the new dramatic play often bears obvious resemblance to music, presenting musical architectures, namely structures that rely on repetition and variation, creating cyclical forms that emphasize rhythm and sound associations and even replace characters with choruses.

One thing has to be emphasised: the play is not the recording of that imaginary performance, it is not a score in the sense of 'a mnemonic device in written symbols' (Bailey, 1993:59). The imaginary performance is only material for the writer, who chooses exactly what to include from his/her imaginary improvisations in the written text, and what to leave out.

2. Overcoming the page

In music, there is something described as 'the anti-instrument attitude', which can be summarized as the instrument coming between the player and its music. The idea, thus, is that 'the instrument has to be defeated' (Bailey, 1993: 101). This, I think, may be true for the theatre text as well, as it constantly tries to overcome the page and transform itself into body, movement, breath. A way to speak about theatricality, therefore, is to see playwriting as a struggle with the instrument: the page.

3. Play as process

Improvisation happens through accident, or through observing accidents; there is trial and error; instead of overall planning, there is relying on the contingent and making use of whatever is available or whatever catches the writer's attention at the time of writing. The play, then, develops in a thinking-as-writing mode, with the writer paying close attention to the occurring connections and the emerging structures. Thus the play stands as a process rather than just a product. Its ideas are in a state of flux, its internal negotiations and conflicts resist resolution, its final lines are not marking a closure. This is an essential part of what the play is.

4. Celebrating the arbitrary

Improvisation participates in the making of the rules that are behind the play's mechanisms and structures and thus it forms, to an extent, the model of logic that the play proposes. For every play puts forward a model of logic, namely the way the world of the play functions, which the audience has to decipher and follow in order to access the play – or else, the play will be rendered unintelligible to the audience. This model of logic is arbitrary in the sense that it does not necessarily follow the laws of science and does not represent the world as we know it, but it is internal to the play. In fact, new dramatic plays persistently present models that refute, for instance, causality, and instead come up with alternative systems of

apprehension of the world. In many new dramatic plays, for instance, the world is created through language: things take place just because they occur in the language (just like in Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies*, mentioned above).

5. Composition

I improvise something, which becomes a rule that I cannot change. From that moment on, it exists as a problem, a challenge, something I need to explore – and so I create a composition around it. The play, thus, is both an improvisation and a composition.

Tea break with Umberto Eco's examiner. I am explaining that I'm writing a chapter that discusses improvisation and a thesis that explores it as a method, making it one of its mechanisms of research. He is not entirely convinced that this is a good idea.

I suspect that, to some extent, improvisation is a technique utilized in much research, as well as in many plays. However, rarely does it seem to be discussed in relation to either. It may be the case that writers, researchers too, think of it as something that belongs to the origins of a work – a play, a thesis – together with the initial ideas, the inspiration, the random inventiveness. And these are rarely perceived as part of the real work, which emerges after careful thinking and planning; looking for things like improvisation in it is often like trying to find a trail that has long gone cold.

Therefore improvisation may stay unacknowledged because it is perceived as the early days of a work, the more or less insignificant phase, and one associated with sketchiness,

randomness, contingency: it lessens the feeling of necessary and unavoidable and thus inevitably slims down the authority of the researcher and the writer. It may also unveil the work as some sort of a game.

To acknowledge improvisation changes things, for acknowledging it as a part of a work also means acknowledging all those things that go with it: that research is always to an extent arbitrary and sketchy; it questions concepts like 'evidence'; it allows processes of trial and error to surface; it reveals its logic as a system that is made up; it exposes its language as one that functions poetically and that makes its own demands on the research.

Improvisation is, I think, essential. I write a play in order to get to know what a play is. (Obviously if I thought I already knew the answer, I wouldn't be writing plays at all.) So I use improvisation to get a sense of what a play can be, and the same goes for writing this practice-led thesis. I have made no overall plan of what it should entail and how this content should be distributed into chapters, or what the succession of chapters would be. Also, there is no methodology as such but various methods of which I make use, which do not endorse an all-encompassing approach but rely on aspects of practice while questioning the idea of evidence ('Although not completely rejecting it either,' Umberto Eco's examiner interrupts, 'for the making of arguments which comply with academic standards is a way of giving evidence.') These methods, one of them being improvisation, show, for instance, that stylistic choices are no less relevant than meaning-related ones. And, of course, choosing specific interlocutors over others is partly a stylistic choice.

Umberto Eco's examiner is still not quite satisfied. I make a further attempt; I steal another phrase from Bailey: 'There is a very basic idea behind improvisation: it means getting from A to C when there is no B; it implies a void which has to be filled,' (Bailey, 1993:x). Improvisation is important for the new dramatic play simply because it wants to acknowledge this void: by exposing its processes, such as improvisation, it also exposes the void.

However, thinking about the void, and what this void may be, and also about theoretical constructions (chapters, plays), brings about the question of narratives. If improvisation is important, it is also because it makes us look closer at the issue of narrative. But what does make a narrative work? And what does 'to work' mean?

(Umberto Eco's examiner is making another cup of tea.)

In the third part of *Lucas and Time*, two speakers named Judy and Laura are engaged in the telling of a story.

From the first lines of THREE it becomes obvious that, apart from narrators, Judy and Laura are also characters in their story, together with their little brother Lucas, Father, and also the landlord, who is paying them a brief visit. The story begins with the speaking characters urging Lucas, who is about to be punished by Father but is momentarily saved by the doorbell, to hide. Although the story is given in the past tense, it also feels as if it is happening right at this moment: it is the urgency in the tone used by the narrators, but also the fact that the information provided is sometimes contested or negotiated between the speakers, which gives the impression of it being made during the course of the narration. In addition, there is an occasional use of the present tense: as one of the speakers narrates in the past tense, the other suddenly jumps into the scene for a moment and prompts Lucas to run, sharing his anxiety and fear as he frantically tries to find a safe place for himself. And so in this scene there are two temporalities, which in some moments become intertwined.

One would immediately wonder, I imagine, about whom the narrators are telling the story to, and for what reason. These are the questions that rhetorical theory deals with: 'it conceives of narrative as somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose that

something has happened' (Phelan, 2012:3). In this scene it is clear that we have two narrators. But who are they speaking to? On what occasion? For what purpose? The text seems to provide no answers.

As narrators, Judy and Laura report on the other characters, offer descriptions of the setting and give a detailed account of the events in a logical order. They are also interpreting these events and making evaluations, for instance, about the landlord's disbelief in hearing Father's reasons for delaying the rent, or the suitability of the hiding places for Lucas. And these are things we normally expect from narrators. As characters in the story, though, they appear somewhat blurred: they indeed encourage Lucas to hide, warning him about what will happen to him if he is found by Father, and later on they try to divert Father's attention so that he will give up on his search for Lucas. But they never intervene in any physical way; in fact, nothing in the development of the story or the actions of the main characters, namely Lucas and Father, assure us that Judy and Laura are actually there. Therefore, we could read these exchanges as fabrications of the speakers, who may also be seen at this point as implied authors.

And then, there is another element to consider. One would initially think that Laura and Judy are aiding each other in the telling of the story. But it soon becomes clear that there is also a sense of antagonism between them, for instance when Judy says 'I thought', only to be immediately corrected by Laura: 'We thought.' The antagonism is exactly about claiming authorship, which climaxes towards the end of the scene with a ping-pong game of words that inevitably gets out of control but without showing a winner: the narration has been torn apart and Lucas has disappeared.

The issue of authorship is also present in the encounter of Father with the landlord, in which the former improvises, as we hear, a pile of excuses whereas the second just wants a 'solid story to hold on to'. The way the narration is given in the whole piece, the techniques used –

improvisation clearly being one of them – draw attention to the mechanisms of story-making and story-telling. There is an obvious intention to grasp the listener's attention and keep it by using character description and the building of suspense. There is colourful speech as well as tempo and rhythm in this narration.

James Phelan proposes a distinction between 'conversational disclosure, which is about the communications between the participants in the dialogue, and authorial disclosure, which has to do with the communications between the implied author and his or her audience through that same dialogue – and across dialogues' (Phelan, 2012:4). In THREE, the communications between the participants, that is the speakers, certainly reveal authorial disclosure: they are the implied authors, they are the ones in charge of the narrative. But they are not just narrating a story, they are inventing it and also performing it, for everything in this scene points to one conclusion: that the speaking characters, Judy and Laura, are giving a performance in front of an audience.

(And although I didn't think about it in this way when I was writing the play, now it seems to me that the performance Judy and Laura are giving could be – why not? – one of the games the guests are playing in SEVEN, just like the guessing game.)

Clearly, a great deal of what I have just described in the third part of *Lucas and Time* seems to be about metamorphosis. The speaking figures shift from being narrators and characters in their story into implied authors, while the narration of a story in past tense becomes a performing event that takes place in present time, in front not of an inner spectator (as in ONE), but of an implied audience that may in fact be the actual audience.

There is more transformation going on in this scene: Father, who first appears as a bully, only to succumb to the authority of the landlord to whom he offers a series of outrageous excuses for not having paid the rent, gradually turns into an 'ogre', while the world is being slowly

transformed into that of a fairytale, contradicting any sense of reality and reason we may have had so far. Indeed, the transformation of Father into an ogre threatening to cut Lucas into pieces and feed him to the worms, marks the passage to the known world of fairytales, although with some changes, for it is common in fairytales for impoverished parents to lose their children deliberately in the woods, and for children to wander around only to end up in the house of an ogre. The children, however, prove themselves cleverer than the ogre, whom they trick, and return home. There is also the motif of the switched bed places, which cause the ogre to kill his own children instead of the visitors (Goldberg, 2003). Here, however, we encounter an alternative scenario, in which the ogre and the parent are one and the same: the bankrupt parent is also overtaken by his violent instinct to destroy his own offspring.

Under a certain reading of this scene, Father becomes an ogre exactly because the story forces him to do so. The style and the language of the narration puts forward emotions of absolute fear and panic – and then Father cannot be anything but an ogre. It is an example of reversed causation: Lucas's fear is what makes Father an ogre, whereas in a natural narrative the fact that Father is an ogre would be what makes Lucas afraid of him. Here it is the narration that gives the tone, and it is the narration that turns Father into an ogre.

Similarly, there is a haunted house just across the little path, simply because haunted houses are a common feature in fairytales. From the moment we understand this world as a fairytale, the haunted house appears as natural (reversed causation). It is the magical power embedded in language that drives the narration and makes it the world of a fairytale.

'It may be true that we talk about language as having somatic effects (words can "wound" or have the power to "assault" us), but, in fact, it is only in fairy tales that they are endowed with the capacity to produce real physical change', observes Maria Tatar (2010:61). Indeed, in fairytales, a witch may turn a human being into a pig by simply shouting the word 'pig'. Tatar is not quite right, though: it is not only in fairytales that language can produce real physical

change, but also in postmodernist narratives.

The field of unnatural narratology, as it has developed in recent decades, 'looks at the various ways which narratives transcend real-world parameters, and, in a second step, it then tries to interpret these 'deviations'' (Alber, 2012:175). In these narratives, temporality is not tied to the time laws as we know them, while causality is reversed, which subverts hierarchical relationships and logical thinking and sometimes defies understanding altogether.

New dramatic plays are part of the postmodernist narratives. They present circular temporalities or eternal loops, in which the narrative's ending is also its beginning, or represents eternity, as in the case of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. They present ontological pluralism, namely logically incompatible storylines, as in Pinter's *Old Times*. They present chronomontages as in Churchill's *Top Girls*. They unfold as reverse causality, in which the present is caused by the future. They show us a world made out of words, as in Crimp's *The City*.

These texts establish their identity by reworking the dramatic conventions and proposing diverse models to replace the dominant nineteenth-century dramatic form. What they do, according to Hans-Thies Lehmann, is challenge the Aristotelian model of logic and question our concept of the real. These plays represent, for Lehmann, the death of drama. There are alternative versions of Lehmann's postdramatic theatre theory, suggested by Gerda Poschmann, Karen Jürs-Munby, Liz Tomlin, David Barnett and others, who refer to these plays as 'contemporary experimental play', 'prose poem', 'the-no-longer-dramatic play', or 'postdramatic drama', to name the most recurrent terms. These terms focus on some specific characteristics of writing (for instance, poetic or narrative features), or highlight specific attitudes towards written text (for instance, text as material). What is common in all of them is the claim also made by postmodernist narratives, as well as fairytales, as shown above: that they challenge our established notions of reality and liberate us from the constraints of our

model of logic, to help us understand the world, and ourselves, in new, radical ways.

In the third part of *Lucas and Time*, Judy and Laura are improvising a story that gradually turns into a fairytale, altering as it goes along the model of logic of the narration. At the same time, the process of improvisation destroys the rigidity of the form of the fairytale, while bringing to the surface its alternative model of logic. But do fairytales and postmodernist narratives really propose a new thinking? Is this what the new dramatic play really does?

Fairytales, which originate from oral tales, were meant for collective reception – just like plays.

In my discussion of Tim Crouch's play *The Author*, I raised questions about the value of 'being in the same room', as presented by the playwright and others, according to whom the presumed value had to do with conducting a 'silent dialogue' and a 'thinking together', and, therefore, it pointed to the theatre as a place of politics. I argued that *The Author* actually brings to the surface certain frictions between politics and theatre, not least because the place of politics is by definition one that grants participants the right to speak up, and to claim that what we do in theatre is primarily political, even though most people in the room are expected to remain silent in their seats, seems to me particularly problematic.

At the same time, it is often said that plays are designed for collective and not individual reception.[25] If plays are indeed designed to 'speak' to collective audiences, there must be some value in 'being in the same room'. But what exactly is this value? Should we accept that

[25] For instance, Austrian playwright Elfriede Jelinek, in an interview with Simon Stephens regarding her play *Sportsplay*, says: 'In spite of the fact my plays look like prose – as they consist of long monologues – they are actually not prose. My plays are texts written to be spoken, while prose narrates. Plays are designed for collective reception, prose for individual reception. So you can't simply say my plays are a kind of prose, since they don't narrate anything. They talk. They speak' (Stephens, 2012).

the invitation that theatre is making is fundamentally political, and that it is about providing a dialogical space for us to think, to speak, to construct meaning?

There are many studies that point out that fairytales are particularly useful for educational purposes. For example, Marylin Fleer and Marie Hammer argue that:

> Fairytales quite explicitly introduce an imaginary situation that is unlikely to be personally experienced by young children in their real lives (i.e. children are unlikely to ever meet a wolf wandering around their community). But what is important here is that introducing fairytales to children *provides an imaginary and predictable genre* that is *emotionally charged* and *contained*, allowing the teacher to use an emotionally imaginative situation for helping children to become aware of their emotions and feeling state when engaged in the storytelling and reenactment of fairytales, potentially leading to the development of children's self-regulation of emotions.
>
> (Fleer and Hammer, 2013:243)

It may be true, then, that in fairytales we watch figures endlessly shifting their shapes and undergoing change but this does not necessarily mean that they seek to 'change listeners and readers in unconventional ways', as Tatar suggests (2010:55). Rather, as Fleer and Hammer explain, fairytales help develop emotion regulation, for 'the unity of emotions and cognition are foregrounded during the telling, retelling and role-playing of fairytales' (2013:240). Fairytales, then, are not so much about exploring the unknown imaginary: rather we could see them as a cultural device for establishing acceptable behaviours and achieving conformity – something that can only be done collectively.

The claim that Tatar makes about fairytales is one that usually accompanies postmodernist narratives – plays, too. Perhaps, however, they do exactly the opposite. Perhaps, just like fairytales, what they actually do is work towards achieving conformity. Derrida put it in this way:

> Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a 'citation'?
>
> (1988:18)

Indeed, postmodernist narratives, which present impossible temporalities and unfold on a logic of reversed causation, are already familiar to us: we already know these 'phenomena' from science fiction and fantasy. What, in fact, postmodernist narratives do is 'borrow these structures from these genres and put them into realist contexts' (Alber, 2012:174).

But having this thinking presented in realist frameworks does not necessarily mean that it encourages the audience to change in unconventional ways, nor that the audience will question their concept of the real. For this thinking, which blends temporalities and makes use of unusual structures and reversed causation and shows how language constructs the world, has already been conventionalized, namely 'turned into basic cognitive categories' (Fludernik, 1996:256). This is why the audience enters unproblematically into the alternative architectures that these unnatural narratives propose; it is exactly because they are already familiar with them. And if fairytales do such a good job on emotion regulation of their audiences, so do the science fiction and fantasy genres.

As Jameson notes, 'genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artefact' (1982:106). In his more recent work, which involves the study of science fiction, utopias and realism, Jameson wonders: 'Can culture be political, which is to say critical and even subversive, or is it necessarily reappropriated and coopted by the social system of which it is a part?' (2005:xv). In his analysis of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy, Jameson concludes: 'Yet utopia as a form is not the representation of radical alternatives; it is rather simply the imperative to imagine them' (ibid.:416).

Judy and Laura's narration in THREE ends up in ruins: the game of words, which was initiated by the claiming of authorship and the stretching of the stylistic device in order to reach the dark heart of the illogical, finally destroys the fairytale. Lucas, the protagonist of the narration, is vanished, and the two storytellers go home, empty-handed.[26]

In his book *The Performance of Reading* (2008), Richard Kivy claims that the literary work is instantiated by its reading:[27]

a performance is a version of the work performed, and for a credible version, the performer must have an interpretation of it. And while he rejects the idea that silent reading produces a kind of theatrical performance before the mind's eye (a theory motivated by the Lockean model of language, that descriptive utterances and texts evoke in the hearer or reader perception-like experiences of the visual kind), Kivy thinks that silent reading of fictional works is a silent performance in the head, in which the reader enacts the part of the storyteller. Silent reading, therefore, is analogous to the reading of a musical score, and that we hear stories in the head, the way Beethoven, when he read the scores of Handel, heard musical performances in the head. Having laid the groundwork, Kivy goes on to present the main points of his theory: first that literature and poetry belong to the performing arts, and second, our silent reading of fictional works is an artistic practice.

As discussed in the previous chapter, however, even the telephone book could be used for

[26] When I re-read this, I remembered Peggy Phelan's writings about what she called 'the captivating presence of her sister's ghost': 'In the clarity of her absence, we redefined ourselves. The real was the absence of her; we were representations of that loss' (1993:12).
[27] The discussion that follows raises the question of two different theoretical fields, namely the reader-response theory in literary studies, and the audience theory in theatre and performance studies. To expand further in either, however, is outside the scope of this thesis.

performance without this meaning that the telephone book is a performance text. Performance texts and plays can be identified as such because they fulfil certain criteria, one of them being that they are 'doubled' by a side text. Besides, even if we did read literature as a silent performance in the head, in the way Kivy proposes, why not assume that we read all sorts of books (history books, or physics, or even the telephone book) as silent performances in the head, enacting ourselves as the part of the storyteller?

Kivy insists on the act of interpretation: we always interpret a literary work while we are reading it and this is what makes it part of the performing arts. But surely we interpret books of physics as we read them as well, for the scientific language is not a transparent language that speaks of things as they are, but a language that we develop in order to speak about the ways we, as human subjects, perceive them; a language which, for at least the last hundred years, is aware of the fact that our perception of physical phenomena is limited, often flawed, and susceptible to change.

Besides, a performance is not the interpretation of a work: we could say that it is an essential aspect of the work, especially when we speak of text-based performance. But at the same time, the performance, exactly like the play, is an autonomous work, which we appreciate for its own merits. And, of course, interpretation is not always an important aspect of our reading. 'Surely, you can enjoy a poem before you understand it', notes Michael Collins. 'Appreciate its music, its linguistic play, its wild originality. The poem's meaning, however provisional it may be, is only one of the many pleasures that poetry offers' (Collins, 2002:29). If to interpret were equal to acting, then the ideal performers would be, indeed, the literary theorists and the critics.

As Christopher Bartel points out:

> While it is certainly true that the act of reading is interpretation driven and that these interpretations can change over time, the same could be said of our experience of paintings and sculptures. 'Viewings' are arguably

> interpretation driven, and as new information is made available to the viewer, such interpretations may also be revised at later viewings. Unless Kivy wants to argue that painting and sculpture should also count as performing arts (which is a claim he resists earlier), then some further explanation is needed in order to show why reading should be counted as performance, but not viewings.
>
> (2010:222)

I think that Kivy is aware of this problem and this is why he insists that as silent performers we identify with the storyteller instead of the characters of the literary work. This seems at first to be an odd suggestion, for our emotional responses have little to do with our silent performing skills – even if we did notice them, which is again an awkward suggestion – and a lot to do with the lives of the characters themselves, their troubles and dilemmas, their anxieties and their boredom; these characters are the reason we read fiction in the first place. But Kivy is anxious to show that we are aware of our skills, in order to support his theory that we are in fact performers, and for this reason we have to identify with the storyteller. For, obviously, if we are unaware of ourselves performing, how can we then be performers?

But even if we assume that we do listen to the voice in our head silently performing, this voice is nevertheless imaginary. And if we were to 'perform' aloud, we would discover that all our performing skills are in reality non-existent – for silent performance relies on imaginary skills and not on actual ones. (I also spoke of an imaginary solo performance earlier in this chapter, with reference to the playwriting process. But there is an obvious difference here: the theatre text is not the imagined performance that takes place in the writer's head, but what is written on the paper.)

It has probably become obvious why I'm interested in Kivy's theory: it echoes familiar arguments about the role of the spectator in the meaning-making, as we know them from Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic theatre. In it, Lehmann proposes that the spectator is in fact co-author of the work, as he/she is responsible for the meaning-making, which makes spectatorship an artistic practice. Indeed, according to Lehmann, writers identified by him as

postdramatic produce what could be called ‘open or writerly texts for performance, in the sense that they require the spectators to become active co-workers of the (performance) text. The spectators are no longer filling in the predictable gaps in the dramatic narrative but are asked to become active witnesses to tolerate gaps and suspend the assignment of meaning’ (Lehmann, 2006:6).

It may be the case that Kivy is one step ahead of Lehmann, for the latter is obliged to limit the spectator’s artistic practice into interpretation and meaning-making, while Kivy claims for his reader the role of the performer as well. This is because Kivy has realized that there can be no claim of an artistic practice in absence of an artistic form, and that’s a huge problem for Lehmann’s theory. Meaning-making, as it is conjured-up by Lehmann, is an intellectual and/or emotional process; it does not take the form of art, and it does not imply composition (whereas Kivy claims that the reading leads to a silent performance, which the reader improvises, and thus his/her interpretation takes an artistic form).

Another interesting point in relation to both Kivy and Lehmann’s theories is about the concept of reader/spectator as it is conjured up in their writings. Narrative theory is particularly useful for this task: we need first to start with the distinction between classical and postclassical narratology. In the classical narratology, the French structuralists included, we find an emphasis on the words *signification*, *meaning, interpretation.* On the other hand, postclassical narratologies propose that, ‘readers *navigate* within story worlds, get *immersed* in them; they try to *frame* and *apperceive* whatever textual strangeness befalls them’ (Mäkelä, 2012:139, original emphasis). Maria Mäkelä further explains that:

> Both structuralist and cognitivist narratologists speak of sense-making, but in considerably different senses. Correspondingly, two alternate reader figures emerge: the reader constructed from the classical-narratological discourse is an industrious and yet somehow doomed performer of higher thinking, reaching for the ultimately unattainable (the ‘meaning’). We call this type Reader 1. The other type – let us call him Reader 2 – erected by some postclassical theories and analyses, is a languid ‘general reader’ who

> opts for the primary, the likely, the coherent and the familiar.
>
> (2012:140)

Clearly, both are interpretive constructs, 'synthetic constellations of hypotheses about the actual reading process' (ibid.). But the distinction between them is significant. Unexpectedly, perhaps, Lehmann's reader/spectator (the co-author of the work and the one responsible for the meaning-making) is actually Reader 1, for obviously a reader/spectator that 'opts for the primary, the likely, the coherent and the familiar' is far from what Lehmann describes as an active spectator who is responsible for the meaning-making of this radical new theatre he envisages, in which the likely and the familiar have no place. Lehmann's spectator is indeed a version of Reader 1: this is the reader as understood by structuralism, but even more skilled and extraordinary. According to Lehmann, 'the task of the spectators is no longer the neutral reconstruction, the re-creation and patient retracing of the fixed image but rather the mobilization of their own ability to react and experience in order to realize their participation in the process that is offered to them' (2006:135). It is obvious that the second (the real requirement of the spectator in the postdramatic theatre) is only possible for the spectator who is already capable of fulfilling the first. Lehmann's spectator, thus, is Reader 1, enhanced by the knowledge, practice and qualities of the theatre-maker.

I think that Lehmann is not entirely unaware that his vision of theatre is a utopia. In the epilogue to the *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann himself admits that:

> Theatre itself would hardly have come about without the hybrid act that an individual broke free from the collective, into the unknown, aspiring to an unthinkable possibility; it would hardly have happened without the courage to transgress borders, all borders of the collective. There is no theatre without self-dramatization, exaggeration, overdressing, without demanding attention for this one, personal body – its voice, its movement, its presence and what it has to say.
>
> (2006:179)

It is precisely the moment that Thespis broke free from the chorus and claimed a new role for himself as an actor that we consider as the very birth of tragedy. He became an actor in the act of cutting himself from the collective, in placing himself as a personal body opposite the collective. But without the collective, there could be no such act. Without the collective, the gesture we call theatre could not take place.

However, given that the postdramatic theory is shaped to a great extent as a manifesto against what Lehmann understands as the Aristotelian model of drama (and perhaps ironically too), Aristotle's vision of the polis was not unlike Lehmann's aspiration of theatre. Aristotle thought of the polis as having the primacy over the individual only insofar as the polis was the only social arrangement that would allow the individual to surpass it. That was the purpose of the polis: to nurture the human ergon, the capacity for freedom and plurality, and to ultimately allow the individual to transcend what is given and to create something new. The polis, however, even in the peak of democracy, failed.

4.

The Tragic

What is the new dramatic play? I'm pursuing this question throughout this thesis, perhaps in a not-so-straightforward way, allowing long arguments that get interrupted by new thoughts, following disjointed paths, postponing conclusions, bringing in my own practice, wandering in the works of others, exploring trial-and-error processes.

Surely there are more direct ways of speaking about new dramatic plays. For example, Jean-Pierre Ryngaert's concise and elegant take on 'recent dramatic writing', as he calls it:

> The play in question would be devoid of action, and its dramatis personae would be vague figures rather than socially or psychologically identifiable characters; in the absence of any *nouement* there would be no denouement either; the issues addressed would not be immediately discernible, and recognizable networks of meaning would have nothing in the least to do with the plot. Beginning and end would doubtless be abrupt, and the necessity for either quite unclear. Readers would, however, have a few tenuous narrative elements available to them, allowing them to surmise that something was being recounted to them with their participation. And, most importantly, there would be talking: an interplay of voices in the shape of monologues, addresses, fragmented dialogue, and speech of uncertain provenance – sometimes suggesting a chorus, sometimes conversation, coming from memory. A veritable whirlwind, sweeping away all the rules of turn-by-turn speaking and address, would nevertheless manage to place speech at the centre of things. For talking would go on, from beyond the grave, as it were, or beyond the character… No theatrical convention reinforcing the notion that all this had to do with an imitation of the real world would be indispensable; nor would parodic features signalling theatricality be in evidence: there would indeed never be any question of anything except a free, artificial space for writing that transgressed all earlier conventions. The play would thus be totally *written* – in the sense that writing, as its texture, would be its chief component and its raw material for more than any subtle conception, any reasoned construction, or even any narrative concern.
>
> (2007:15-16)

Perhaps the play in question would also include non-verbal signs, such as beats and pauses, whose role would be to structure the play internally; it would communicate a strong sense of direction not necessarily through stage directions but through other elements such as the punctuation marks or typography; it would reinvent theatrical time and space, creating its own constraints; it would assimilate and transform narrative and poetic features into dramatic writing; it would invent language that would celebrate its original vocation of sound incantation; it would create meaning by rhythmic associations; it would produce sensory experiences by mental constructions and the conjunction of verbal images; it would include an acute understanding of the actor's processes; it would acknowledge the actor's presence and incorporate it; it would acknowledge and incorporate the presence of the audience.

Ryngaert's critical study is part of a body of work that discusses the formal issues of contemporary theatre texts;[28] in contrast to many approaches, however, Ryngaert is careful not to offer a theoretical model for this sort of writing. Rather, he focuses on presenting a composite of traits drawn from a variety of works, while at the same time distancing himself from those who place their analysis within a larger theoretical framework, the postdramatic theatre in particular.

Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic theatre builds to some extent on Peter Szondi's *Theory of the Modern Drama* (1987), which reads late nineteenth and early twentieth century drama, such as that of Ibsen, Brecht and Beckett, Genet and Handke as responses to a 'crisis of drama': social themes could no longer be contained by the traditional dramatic form. Szondi's argument is that forms are necessarily bound to the historical and ideological environment in which they grow. His model of criticism is to examine one form in relation to that which immediately preceded it. In this way, history manifests itself in terms of difference between

[28] Writers such as Karen Jürs-Munby, Liz Tomlin, David Barnett, Gerda Poschmann, Aleks Sierz, Dan Rebellato and Graham Saunders – to name a few – have written articles on the subject as well as monographs of certain playwrights, including Martin Crimp, Sarah Kane and others.

what it was and what it is. As Michael Hays points out, 'this historicization of the idea of form eliminates the possibility of any systematic, normative poetics as such' (1983:70).

For Szondi, it is the works of Genet and Handke in particular that embody the disorder of the modern as a social as well as aesthetic phenomenon: by showing that the dramatic conventions of language and action are grounded in the cultural conventions of society, and by exposing the formal patterns which have organized the modern, these writers marked the historical limits of modernity. And although they do not end dramatic representation, they 'announce the coming of a new formal-ideological construct which as yet can only be referred to as the "post-modern"' (Hays, 1983:80).

In *Postdramatic Theatre,* which I have already discussed at some length, Hans-Thies Lehmann goes a step further and argues for a theatre that breaks away from the Aristotelian model of drama; how exactly we are to understand this break, however, or whether Lehmann's theory can indeed include text-based theatre, has been the object of much debate. What is certain is that Lehmann rejects the forms and conventions of the authored written text as 'the vehicle of a teleological view of history' (Lehmann, 2006:39). Liz Tomlin observes that for Lehmann, 'it is not only the written playtext's originary position in the artistic process that binds it to the teleological implications of the dramatic, but the text-world's completeness and independence from the event of performance' (2009:60). The completeness of the text-world is identifiable by certain markers that refer back to the dramatic model.

In this line of thought, David Barnett proposes that 'the postdramatic theatre-text can refuse to represent and leave all possible readings open' and that 'the interpretation takes place in the auditorium, if at all', while he also insists that 'the architecture of the play is deliberate but the sequence is not predicated upon the demands of a plot; no story emerges from the chaos. The play takes place in an unnamed place and presents unqualified material' (2008:21). Plot,

story, action, conflict, structuring of time, mimesis are the markers of completeness. Instead, the postdramatic play has no plot, story or action, but only presents textual and visual material and an unstructuring of time – for representation and structuring of time mark, for these writers, a text as dramatic.

Surely this claim of lack of completeness can be true when speaking of a performance text, although not of a play, as I have argued elsewhere in this thesis. The performance text can only present material and avoid any structuring of time when it is written as part of a larger performance text, which itself carries the responsibility to represent a world, even if it is a world that bears no resemblance to the world as we know it, and to structure time, even if this time gives the impression of a strangely suspended, theatrical time that has arguably nothing to do with how we experience clock time. This larger performance text, thus, fulfils the dramatic demand for completeness. Similarly, claims such as absence of action, seem to me at best naive: for action is already incorporated in the act of writing, a writing that is already theatrical as the words are doubled by their silent performance, creating a text-spectacle; a writing which, as pure action, manifests itself in the internal workings of the text, in its structures and mechanisms (and certainly dramatic conflict may take place not as plot but in the way these structures and mechanisms perform together), creating complex, organized unities which, as Aristotle describes in his analysis of the principle of motion in his work *Physics,* are at work, which blend both actuality and potentiality, and which all together compose something that endures as a thing in the world.

'Lehmann is objecting to a notion of drama that is already finished', suggests Jean-Pierre Sarrazac (2013:296), whose theory of drama also takes inspiration from Szondi's theory. Sarrazac sees a rupture with the history of drama at the beginning of modernity. This rupture marks what Sarrazac calls 'the reign of disorder': there is a search for forms that will accommodate this disorder, which starts around 1880 with plays by Chekhov and Ibsen, and continues all the way to contemporary theatre texts. This disorder has to do with 'the loss of meaning in a postmodern universe', with globalization, with the post-industrial world. The first

disorder is, for Sarrazac, World War I (ibid.). In his *Poétique du Drame Moderne: De Henrik Ibsen à Bernard-Marie Koltès,* he examines contemporary European writing, presenting extracts from 120 plays of at least 50 playwrights, as transformed through a process of experimentation and hybridization of disparate techniques, which lead to a renewal of drama. Modern drama, then, embraces philosophical, epic, lyric, documentary forms as well as dialectical elements, and leaves space to media external to the text, such as new technologies, dance or circus. Sarrazac attempts a distinction between what he calls 'drame-de-la-vie' and 'drame-dans-la-vie', the latter referring to the traditional dramatic model and the former implying a continuous emancipation of the dramatic form and thus a fresh understanding of the dramatic conventions.

Modern or contemporary drama is, for Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, an open form which allows drama to evolve beyond its boundaries. It is a drama which, from around 1880 onwards, hasn't stopped moving away from itself. Sarrazac calls it 'rhapsodic': he opts for this term because in music 'rhapsody is the freer form, although it does not imply the absence of form' (2013:393). Rather, in the inner mechanisms of this rhapsodic drama, which combines mimesis and diegesis, there is a clash between form and no-form. Sarrazac argues that modern drama, contrary to the Aristotelian-Hegelian model, does not seek harmony but accepts its own fragmentary nature, for it is a drama in a 'constant loss of identity' that has become 'alien to itself'. In his view, these ruptures are a manifestation not of a crisis of drama, but of the human being. The character of modern drama is 'the man who has completely lost his personal identity […] who can be called L'impersonnage: a transpersonal figure that gathers all masks on his face, or rather removes them all one by one […] a character asked to play all roles of the human being' (ibid.:108). Thus, modern drama 'does not act. It endures. It witnesses its own suffering' (ibid.:109). It is a static drama that unfolds as 'the repetition of the same, the repetition of the loss of self, the loss of identity, the loss of the Other' (ibid.:113). However, drama, although deprived of tragic hubris, persists: for 'the heart of drama, which allows it to survive throughout its history, is nothing but the encounter with the Other, on stage and in front of an audience' (ibid.:118).

Sarrazac shows no sympathy to the tendency that classes the playwright, and the play itself, as redundant, a tendency that is closely linked to the so-called *Regietheater* (director's theatre) which regards the theatre-text as mere raw material for theatrical production and, as Gerda Poschmann points out, even understands itself as 'a theatre against the text' (Poschmann, 1997: 20), and which has been 'an important driving force for postdramatic theatre forms since the late 1960s' (Jürs–Munby, 2009:48). Sarrazac's thought, perhaps because apart from theorist he is also a playwright, is actively engaged with the theatre-text. However, he also sees a rupture with the 'old drama': despite the fact that the rhapsodic play borrows various elements from tragedy, modern tragic, according to him, has nothing to do with the tragic as understood in tragedy.[29] His suggestion that the essence of drama is the encounter with the Other seems to be based on Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical writings, in which he attempted to form an ethics developed around the concept of the Other. Levinas' philosophy, as Nicholas Ridout observes, has been readily utilized by performance theory: he rightly points out that 'this state of affairs runs the risk of creating a theatrical culture in which performances are valued only for what they might offer in terms of ethics' (2009:9).

Similarly to Sarrazac, Jean-Pierre Ryngaert 'refuses to lend his voice to the chorus of those endorsing or calling for a dramaturgical tabula rasa', and sees recent dramatic writing's 'formal departures and reinventions as signs – sometimes clumsy or excessive, sometimes truly exciting– of the rebirth of a drama which, having completed its mourning for the "old theatre", is developing ways of writing that approach fiction from a different angle' (2007:16). Not surprisingly, then, Ryngaert avoids the term 'new' and instead opts for 'recent'. Yet, in a similar way to Sarrazac's, Ryngaert's understanding seems to me to be influenced by the postdramatic thought, as for instance, when he sees the new dramatic play as devoid of action. Moreover, in his hesitation to engage with a larger theoretical framework for the sort of plays he examines, he invites the possibility to simply regard them as 'experimental', as if the

[29] To discuss Aristotle's dramatic model is outside the scope of this thesis. This writer has the opinion that a critical analysis should not limit itself to Aristotle's *Poetics* but should also include at least his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *The Politics*. Nonetheless, there are enough surviving tragedies that speak for themselves.

predicament of the new dramatic play is to experiment and play with forms. And there is also another risk: to confuse the new dramatic play with recent writing which imitates its forms and structures, without sharing its political and ethical gestus.

This gestus is the reason for my opting for the term 'new dramatic writing': it hints at a new political and ethical positioning, that is a new relationship with dramatic writing itself, with theatre and the world at large. The new dramatic play, while certainly rejecting the nineteenth century dramatic form, searches for its roots, for dramatic writing does not necessarily move in an organized, methodical way that would allow us to rely on Szondi's model, but rather dares to defy or sabotage its expected role as the vehicle of a teleological view of history; it takes huge leaps, looking not at its immediate past, but at the very beginning and the almost forgotten. It looks at tragedy.

Elfriede Jelinek's play *Sports Play (Ein Sportstück)* begins with this note: 'The author does not give many instructions, this much she has learnt by now. Do with it what you want. The only absolutely necessary thing is: Greek choruses' (1998:7).

New dramatic plays often employ certain structures from tragedy, as in the use of chorus in Jelinek's *Sports Play* – and sometimes, they are straightforwardly new versions of Greek tragedies. My spontaneous list of this second category would include *Cruel and Tender* by Martin Crimp, *Aars!* by Luk Perceval and Peter Verhelst, *Phaedra* by Matthew Maguire, *Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl, *Orestes* by Charles Mee, *The Gospel at Colonus* by Lee Breuer, *Die Schutzbefohlenen* by Elfriede Jelinek, *Philoktet* by Heiner Müller, *Iphigenia* by Mircea Eliade, *The Trojan Women* by Jean-Paul Sartres, *Antigonemodell 1948* by Bertold Brecht, *Antigonick* by Anne Carson, *Idomeneus* by Roland Schimmelpfennig, to name a few. A proper list would perhaps be another research project (Umberto Eco would have probably agreed: he composed lists with the same enthusiasm he wrote novels). I find it interesting that many

writers whose work has been commonly identified as postdramatic are continuously engaged with the Greek myths, and with tragedy itself. But why keep returning to something one is supposedly done with?

The classicist Florence Dupont suggests that 'whenever a contemporary author writes a new play that tackles a Greek myth, the break with the tradition of the tragic aesthetic is total' (Vasseur-Legangneux, 2004:10). In his article *Seven observations for the possibility of a modern tragic – which could be 'the tragic of everyday life',* Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, as mentioned earlier, argues that that there is a complete separation between tragic and tragedy, marked by the Enlightenment. He claims that the character in modern drama is the everyday man, and that the tragic takes place as everyday life. The decline of the dramatic form, thus, has to do with the fact that the conflict in modern drama is an internal condition of the character, while action is 'no more than a shadow: an action invented, always unfulfilled' (Sarrazac, 2013:114). Ariane Eissen argues that 'any new presentation of a mythical past must be associated with the revival or subversion or even destruction of old dramatic conventions; more dynamically, it may involve the invention of fresh ways of writing for the theatre' (2007:39), while later on she asserts that 'reprising a myth is an opportunity to make a critical assessment of it, as well as of the dramatic conventions themselves' (2007:43).

However, it is a misconception to regard tragedy as an ordinary form of mythical narrative, for Greek tragedy and Greek myths are not the same thing – or, as Jean-Pierre Vernant puts it, 'myth was both in tragedy and rejected by it' (1988:14). The myths were the tragic poets' material; they were already known to the audience, which ensured that their attention was less engaged with issues of plot and more with the way the myth was tackled by the tragic poet. This would in fact decide the success or not of the play. Clearly with tragedy, as with the new dramatic play, the myth/story is not as important. What counts is the logos, the narration, and the transformation it entails.

Taking the example of Medea: Euripides did in fact take great liberties with the myth and changed it substantially. The myths involving Medea numbered at least seven and carried within them several different traditions. As Maria Gasouka (2011) explains, they all included the basic motif of the argonautic expedition, the daughter who enables the stealing of the golden fleece and the relocation to Corinth. In perhaps the oldest version, the deaths of Medea' s children were not linked to revenge and murder but to her unsuccessful attempt to make them immortal with the help of Hera. In another version they were killed by Creon, and in a third Medea is reconciled with her husband and, together with their son, they leave Corinth and create a new home in a new land. In traditional songs, Medea was the queen of Corinth, and, before being overthrown by the worship of Hera, Medea was considered a goddess, at least in the city of Corinth. Euripides' version is altogether different – and it is his version that overshadowed the previous ones. 'It is certain that, before Euripides' *Medea*, the murdering of children had not been a theme in the art world, in contrast to what followed' (Gasouka, 2011:238).

There are numerous adaptations of Medea – again, my spontaneous list would include *Landschaft mit Argonauten/Medeamaterial* by Heiner Müller, *Médée Kali* by Laurent Gaudé, *MammaMedea* by Tom Lanoye, *Manhattan Medea* by Dea Loher, *Medea/Stimmen* by Christa Wolf, *Medea* by Franca Rame and Dario Fo, *Médée – poème enragé* by Jean-René Lemoine, *Arhetip Medeja* by Ivana Sjako, to name a few (a proper list would perhaps be another project for lovers of lists). Why, then, is Medea a point of return for contemporary writers? I suggest that it is not the myth they return to for it is not the other versions of the myth that interest them. It is Euripides' tragedy they return to - for Euripides manages to create a machine that speaks of archetypal passion and revenge which allows us to have a glimpse into chaos, exactly because he reworks the myth through the specific forms, structures and language.

If the western drama of previous centuries revisited the Greek myths, the new dramatic play goes back to tragedy to study its forms and architectures: these include novelization, in the sense of contamination of the dramatic writing by narrative features, which involves having

characters also as narrators; the extensive use of musicality through rhythm, repetitions, variations, which reveals a connection with the ritual; a strong sense of language's poetic and theatrical power and the impression that what is actually produced on stage is speech.

Indeed, the insistence on language and its functions, which include attesting to the inability of communication, has become common currency in the analysis of new dramatic plays. But language has similar function in tragedy: as Vernant points out, 'the function of the words used on stage is not so much to establish communication between the various characters as to indicate the blockages and barriers between them and the impermeability of their minds, to locate the points of conflict' (1988:42). Specifically in relation to the chorus, he notes that it 'hesitates and oscillates, rebounding from one meaning to the other, or sometimes dimly suspecting a meaning as yet unrevealed, or actually unconsciously formulating in a play on words an expression with a twofold meaning' (ibid.:43). Opacity and incommunicability are, in all known tragedies, part of the tragic message.

In her interview with Simon Stephens about her play *Sports Play*, Elfriede Jelinek says:

> The oldest surviving tragedy, *The Persians* by Aeschylus, beats [the foundation of] Attic democracy by a fraction. The emergence of the latter is dated between the Persian wars and the Peloponnesian War. We, the dramatists, got there first. It is interesting that the treatment of historical events by art precedes the civilization of people through democracy. After all, the Persians are so great because they give back humanity to their opponents – or rather they don't deny it to them – and not only to stress their own martial achievements in victory.
>
> (Jelinek, 2012)

Jelinek is not quite right in suggesting that *The Persians* beat the foundations of democracy: *The Persians,* Aeschylus' earliest surviving play, was performed in 472 BC when the city had already got rid of the old rule, represented by the tyrant Hippias who, after his expulsion, joined forces with the national enemy 'in the hope of being restored as the puppet of a foreign

power […] and came to symbolize in popular imagination the spectacular rise to power of the man who, having amassed great riches, forgets that he is mortal and is lured by divine wrath to self-destruction' (1941:85). The Attic democracy, under Cleisthenes' leadership, was already exploring its potential and power – and, interestingly, *The Persians* were presented at the Greater Dionysia by Pericles himself, who was soon going to establish himself as the first among Athenians for a period of forty years known as the Golden Age of Athens.

It is certainly true, however, that Aeschylus experienced both the old system and its breaking up, as he was fifteen years old when Cleisthenes' counter-revolution brought the end of Hippias' old system, allowing new ideas and values to burst into the life of the city. In addition, Aeschylus fought to defend Athens in the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC, against the army of Darius I, and again in the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC against the army of Xerxes I (and perhaps also in the Battle of Plataea in 479 BC).

The Persians is the first contemporary play,[30] as it deals with the Battle of Salamis and draws on Aeschylus' own experiences: if Jelinek reads it as the tragic poet's attempt to give back humanity to the opponents, Heiner Müller recognizes in Aeschylus' tragedy the endless cycle of History, as a series of conquests and defeats, with the collapse and resurgence of the same systems of power. Aeschylus participates, with his innovations (such as the addition of the second actor), in the making of a new aesthetic creation, a new type of spectacle with its own rules and characteristics, a theatrical form whose language 'ranges far beyond the personal, domestic and familial; the dramatic situation in which tragedies are embedded has deep communal roots; and tragic outcomes have profound social, political, moral, and religious implications' (Rehm, 2003:38). With *The Persians,* we find a form that brings together the past (through the element of lyric and the use of chorus, and also because it was written as part of a trilogy – another of Aeschylus' innovations – together with two tragedies that dealt with the mythical past), the present but also the future. For Aeschylus' constant

[30] From the surviving tragedies. In fact, there were two more tragedies that dealt with the Persian Wars from Aeschylus' older contemporary, Phrynichus.

question, as reflected in all his known works, is exactly about the evolution of the community from tribal formations to the organization of polis. Tragedy was, as Rush Rehm notes, 'a theatrical form that was deeply grounded, exceedingly confident, simple in plot, archetypal in character, strict in form, vast in emotion, cosmic in purview, Athenian in spirit' (ibid.:23).

Tragedy certainly involves a particular moment. It appears 'rooted in social reality but it is not a reflection of it, in fact it calls it into question. It turns it into a problem' (Vernant, 1988:21). In autumn 2009, theatre director Dimiter Gotscheff started working on Greece's National Theatre production of *The Persians* for the ancient theatre of Epidaurus, as part of the Hellenic Festival 2010. Three years earlier, Gotscheff had presented *The Persians* in Heiner Müller's translation, an award-winning production of the Deutsches Theater. In an interview I conducted with him, he said:

> At the beginning of the rehearsals of the German production, I thought it would be a good idea to try an experiment: I asked the actors to leave aside for a moment Heiner Müller's translation, and work on Durs Grünbein's[31] translation instead. Before we finished the first page, everyone was protesting: what we had in front of us was a translation that kept the tragedy's black holes hidden, not allowing us to dive in; in that translation Aeschylus' text was smoothed out, his language was disarmed.
>
> (Gotscheff, 2010)

For Gotscheff, despite the fact that the German theatre had always been dealing with the Greek tragedy, the real question was what it actually did with it. And this is why Heiner Müller's translation stood out: for 'Müller did not try to camouflage its black holes, or flatten the text out in order to make it manageable, as did the elite postmodern German theatre; he laid it bare' (Gotscheff, 2010).

Tragedy, this aesthetic creation that was born in Athens at the time of the flourishing of the Attic democracy, introduced the concept of the tragic. It brought together the mythic hero and

[31] An award-winning contemporary German poet and essayist.

the polis, language as the art of persuasion and language as a barrier of communication, the principle of causality and temporal sequence and the disorder, rationality and the natural environment, the individual and the collective; indeed, in the Greek tragedy, the tragic ultimately signifies an antithesis, an opposition, a conflict between the individual and the collective. In the tragic perspective, the individual, as well as action itself, are seen 'not as things that can be defined or described, but as problems, as riddles' (Vernant, 1988:38). But neither could the individual survive without the polis, nor could the polis have a future without the individual (not surprisingly, the tragic collapse of the hero is also the demolition of polis, which lasted no more than a hundred years). This is what Aristotle meant by catharsis: as Giannis Papadopoulos puts it, 'if the tragic hero suffers, it is because he is burdened with the tragic responsibility, namely the resistance against the divine or earthly authority. So that the collective will be free of the burden of the tragic responsibility, which originally belongs to each and all members of the collective' (2011:37).

The new dramatic play looks at tragedy because it speaks of the original conflict; it is a product of democracy, and it also mirrors its vulnerability, and perhaps also its guilt. *The Persians* was written to remind the Athenians of the outstanding services that Themistocles offered to the city, for without him, the city of Athens would have been lost. And yet, Themistocles' status as a hero was also his downfall, as the city saw in his genius and dedication the sin of hubris and thus it ostracized him. Aeschylus' tragedy did win the award but it did not save Themistocles, who was eventually accused of secretly negotiating with King Xerxes. Themistocles had to flee, as he was sentenced to death, but ended up taking his own life.

The new dramatic play also looks at tragedy in order to understand its own predicament, which is also the writer's predicament, and search, in its structures and language, for acts of resistance. Those who suggest that in the new dramatic play we find no character but a series of nameless masks are not mistaken. This is because the character is not the one carrying the burden of the tragic anymore; rather, it is the text itself that takes the place of the

tragic hero and stands opposite the collective, presenting complex architectures in an attempt to render itself impenetrable enough in order to survive as one thing, as a composition, as a body. It speaks a language that is fragmentary, that doesn't allow itself to be consumed, that denies to be political in the way political is understood by the consumerist society and media. It claims its own value. It resists being defined and disciplined by theory. It exposes the conditions of its production by being ironic towards its own staging, or by actively demanding an honest and meaningful relationship with it.

'The final program is the invention of silence', says Müller in *Ajax For Instance.* Silence is not a given. It requires to be made. With *Germania 3,* Müller presents a text-machine that denies to speak, as a conscious act of resistance; instead, it returns the responsibility to the collective, challenging them to find their place in the play and to take a stand, and letting them know that taking a stand is not without consequence.

In early 2016, I signed a contract with Stadttheater Osnabrück to include my play *Lucas and Time* in their 2016–2017 season, as a world premiere, upon confirmation that the play would not be subject to any cuts, edits or changes of any sort.

I was told that, although the German theatre has a notorious reputation for mistreating plays, in fact German practitioners rework classic texts but certainly new works do not receive the same treatment. When it comes to a new play, according to the law, the theatre holds the right to propose cuts or edits equivalent to ten percent of the play, always in communication with the writer; this, however, would not apply to world premieres, as it would be non-ethical to present for the first time a play whose textual integrity had been violated. In Germany, new plays are not often published and are thus only accessible to the audience via a theatre production. I sought to be reassured on this matter in all following communications with the theatre, as well as with the appointed director of the play.

Despite my attempts, I was not part of the discussion on who the appointed director of the play would be. My main reservation with the theatre's chosen director had to do with the fact that she had no experience directing new dramatic plays, or particular knowledge of the British theatre tradition. (I knew already that *Lucas and Time* is not an easily manageable play: the first staging attempt in Athens in 2013 ended in the cancellation of the production after a month-and-a-half of rehearsals, due to the actors' difficulty in comprehending the mechanisms of the play and their persistence in relying on acting methods that didn't match the play's aesthetic proposition. This outcome was not a surprise to me, given that the production, which included the actors, was set while I was writing the play. During the process of writing it became clear to me that I had to choose between writing a play that the specific actors would be able to understand and support, or writing the play that I wanted to write.)

In the first meeting I had with the director at Stadttheater Osnabrück in March 2016, I realized that the way we understood theatricality was significantly different. The director had already met with the theatre's dramaturg and they had come up with the idea to add another (silent) character, a child, since the play included images of childhood. The director was not keen on what she understood as a sense of duality, given that two performers would do all parts (indeed, the play was written with the idea that all parts would be performed by two actors, although it ultimately leaves it to the director to decide), and argued that this would be boring for the audience. In addition, she did not connect at all with FIVE, which seemed to her unnecessary and expendable.

I argued against the idea of adding a child performer on stage, as this would inevitably modify the play, affecting its mechanisms and intentions. I was concerned by the fact that the director seemed to think that, if something is not represented on stage, it does not exist at all – and thus, for her, childhood had to be represented by the stage presence of a child. This, I reckoned, could only mean that she had not fully comprehended the role and function of language in my play. At the same time, I had the feeling that what the director saw as duality

was in fact a misreading of the play: she seemed to think that the world of the play consisted of two women who are performing various parts throughout the play (for what reason? This question the director could not answer).[32] Instead, the play works through the juxtaposition of two opposite realities, the multiplicity of voices of the text on one side and the specific voices and bodies of two stage performers on the other – and, obviously, the relationship between these two realities: for there is a disjunction between the performers as actual moving-and-speaking figures on stage and the speaking figures (characters) of the play; how these come together includes various processes of intersection and interexchange, substitution and rearrangement, and, most of all, an ongoing investigation of what sort of investment there is between them. All these processes create the movement of the play, its dynamic, its tension, its shape, its unfolding in time and perhaps its sense of the tragic, too. All the while, the director's reading in fact meant turning the performers (the stage reality) into characters (fictional reality), who replace the actual characters (speaking figures, voices) of the play**...**

And then FIVE was, for the director, something of a black hole, whose language, rhythm, associations and images, functions and gestures, were a complete mystery. Neither the director nor the creative team, for instance, had realized that the voices of Evi and Vivi in FIVE are children's voices. I suspected that the director was struggling with the fact that this part of the play presented images which were not straightforwardly theatrical – in the sense of being doable on stage – but poetic.

In the end, I suggested that the director could perhaps use recorded voices of children for FIVE, mixed with the actual voices of the performers on stage, in an attempt to find something that would satisfy the director's wish to have the 'presence' of children in the performance but without having an actual child on stage, and also give a sense of how FIVE could be done. After all, the only thing that FIVE requires from a stage presentation, in my opinion, is to be spoken. I also sent extended notes and writings (parts of this thesis as well) to help the

[32] There was an article on *Lucas and Time* published in *Theater Haute,* written by one of the production's dramaturgs. It was based on my writings, but also claimed that, in the play, two characters are performing various roles. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to correct the initial version.

director and the creative team get a better sense of the play, its mechanisms, its meanings, its gestures. Before the start of the rehearsals, the director had finally decided to abandon the idea of adding a child on stage; however, I could not tell with certainty whether this was because the director was convinced by my arguments or because it posed some practical problems for the production.

I was not invited to attend actual rehearsals. After the first four weeks of rehearsing in June, there was a break for the summer holidays; the rehearsals would continue for another two weeks in August up till the premiere at the end of that month. During this break, it was communicated to me by the theatre that there was a possibility that the director would leave out FIVE, on the grounds that it was, in her opinion, a repetitive scene which offered nothing to the play; thus she felt that leaving it out would be best for the audience. I objected strongly, reminding the theatre that they had guaranteed the textual integrity of the play, and that it would be non-ethical of them to allow these cuts. Given that I had made clear from the beginning that *Lucas and Time* is for me not a performance text to be used as some sort of material but a play, namely a composition whose textual integrity is fundamental, making cuts would mean depriving me of my right to define my own work. Also, I refused to accept that the theatre or the director could speak on the audience's behalf. I asked the theatre to rule out the possibility of cuts. The theatre did not reply to the above arguments and refused to rule out this possibility; in their opinion, this should be the director's decision.

Apart from my arguments that pointed to the ethical and political implications of this decision, I also insisted on being told the artistic reasons for the cuts. What was it about the new construction that meant the director could not accommodate FIVE? What was the director's intention and concept? In the following weeks, I sent letters and an extensive dramaturgical analysis of the play. I received no reply.

Upon research, I found out that the law in Germany, similarly to most European countries,

recognizes the ‘right to textual integrity’, according to which, no cuts, additions, editing or alterations of any sort are permitted without a playwright’s consent. This is related to the ‘intention of the play’: according to the law, the artistic intention of the play can only be decided by the writer. I thus wrote to the theatre about it, pointing out that any changes inflicted on the play would mean violation of my legal rights. Two weeks before the opening night, the theatre informed me that the director insisted on leaving out most parts of FIVE, as she claimed that this was essential for the specific production, and that I was expected to give my consent for the cuts. I had no idea if the theatre would cancel the production in the event of my refusal to accept the cuts (I suspect that they would have proceeded anyway, thinking that, as a non-resident, I was not in a position to pursue the issue legally). They also sent me the cut scene: the director had indeed left out most of FIVE; more specifically, she had kept fragments of it which she had attached together in an awkward composition that had very little, if anything, to do with the original scene. Worse, I could not detect any dramaturgy behind this composition, and so my questions on what the directing concept was were left unanswered. Instead, I was told that the theatre was sympathetic to my request to know what the director meant to do with my play, but in theatre things develop every day… I interpreted this as implying that the director was using devising as the main directing technique, and had no concept.

Although I again made my objections clear, I felt at this point that I had no choice other than to give my consent to the cuts. Surely there must be some irony here, given my long-term engagement with a research project that argues for the textual integrity of the play – and of this particular play.

The theatre offered me the option to include FIVE in the production’s programme, as a token of their appreciation.

The world premiere of *Lucas and Time* is to take place in the emma theater on 28

August 2016: this is the contemporary stage of the Stadttheater Osnabrück. It is a huge room with beautiful windows, divided in two, namely stage and auditorium. As I enter, the stage is mostly dark.

The first image is a slightly diagonal corridor made of light. A woman walks slowly on it, from the back of the stage to the front, delivering the first lines as she walks. She is Maia of ONE. She stops. She describes the picnic. The text's beats and pauses have been erased; her speech is unnaturally fast. She is wearing a patterned dress that somehow brings to mind the world of the picnic, with the grass, the river, the bright blue sky. She is smiling, her voice is mellow. Her last lines are disturbed by the sound of heavy steps coming from the stairs at the side of the stage. "And here it is/ the grand finale of my improvisations" says the character, but the phrase is crushed under those heavy steps. Then they stop for a moment, the performer who delivers Maia's monologue quickly finishes her lines and then the second woman storms in

(while I am thinking that, in contrast to what I have described in the first chapter of this thesis, here the staging has not taken into account the mechanism of the inner spectator, which is meant to bring together the two worlds, the lavish picnic of the narration and the austerity of the bare stage, by juxtaposing their difference; for everything that the text withholds by presenting a narrator/character who allows no emotion or gives no explanation for her actions, would make sense through this difference. The act of narration itself – to whom is the story narrated and why – would become striking, placing the actual spectator in a visible position. For this is the gesture that the play makes to the spectator from the very beginning: the character names the mind as the place where everything happens; she mentions three things but lets us only hear about the first, which is about the picnic with Lucas. What are the other two?[33] That things happen in the mind and that the spectator will participate in inventing

[33] In 2014, *Lucas and Time* was selected, alongside eight more plays by international writers, to appear in the Forum of Contemporary Dramaturgy, organized by the Greek branch of the International Theatre Institute, and was presented as rehearsed reading in the French Institute of Athens and the National Theatre of Northern Greece. On this second occasion, the appointed director cut the line 'three things come to mind'. She later explained that, although she read the text multiple times, she only found that

them is the promise of the play. It speaks about the sort of play it is, how it understands theatricality, and what kind of gesture it makes to the audience. And thus, in this monologue, the story, the images, Lucas, all belong to the language, not to the stage. The stage is not the end, but only a medium, part of the journey. But here, the corridor of warm light, and the patterned dress, and, most of all, the performer's voice and tone and facial expression – yes, a woman speaking about a past love affair, a recognizable image – are used to interpret the text, or fill in what is missing, or indeed replace the text, which is given at such speed that would be difficult for anyone hearing it for the first time to think too much about it anyway, as well as to replace the sort of theatricality I have just spoken of with a different one, in which the spectator needs only to rely on what he/she sees on the stage. And if there is still a sense that the spectator is somehow part of this, simply because of the fact that there is a solo figure on the stage looking towards the audience while telling a story, the hint of another presence – the heavy steps approaching on the stairs – certainly weakens it. And while I'm trying to make sense of it all)

and this second woman is dressed in a nurse's uniform. Now we can see the whole stage: towards the back there is a huge cage made of spring units, the material used inside mattresses. This is where the first performer has retreated, her body movement now resembling that of a very old person. Inside this cage, there are various objects: a wooden horse – mentioned in SIX; a table in front of a mirror, on which there is a chessboard and pieces – mentioned repeatedly in TWO – and some 'transformation tools', namely wigs and makeup. At the front of the stage, near the opaque windows, there is a small desk. The nurse, and the desk, and the impenetrable windows give the impression of a clinic, whereas the back of the stage looks like a warehouse

(I'm already aware of the set designer's idea to stage the play in the 'attic' mentioned in SIX. The cage, by the way, is inspired by Louise Bourgeois' work)

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the monologue spoke of one thing (the picnic with Lucas), and thus she felt that the mentioning of three things was probably a miscalculation by the writer.

and clearly we are in the world of TWO, only it is now strangely divided in two: the front part could represent a clinic, whereas the back gives away a theatrical atmosphere, with the huge cage and the various objects, including the wigs – one of them is now fitted on Woman's head, who is sitting inside the cage and is slowly applying powder on her face.

The abrupt appearance of Nurse does not allow any gap between the two scenes. She goes and sits behind the desk. There is music playing. She holds a box that looks like a polaroid camera, although it is not, and 'takes' a selfie. She herself makes the sound of the polaroid. Her face is covered in white powder. And when Woman's transformation is near complete, their exchanges start: everything is said quickly, without breath; again, the play's beats and pauses have been omitted.

Nurse looks like a grotesque incarnation of Nurse Mildred Ratched from Milos Forman's film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.* Her posture is austere and menacing, there is a bunch of keys hanging on her uniform, which brings to mind a guard in a mental hospital, and her voice and manner are coarse and exaggerated. She is much younger and certainly more vibrant than Woman, to whom she speaks impatiently and without any tenderness,

(which is a re-writing of the relationship between Woman and Nurse. For, in the play, this is a relationship based on dependence, on both sides, and resembles that of a long-married couple. They are both old – there are certainly enough markers in the text to indicate that – and they are both utterly tired from the burden of living. They take refuge in repetition, in performing mechanical actions, in playing the same games, in having the same conversations and in speaking of things absent: for Woman it is the poem and the letter, for Nurse it is everyday things such as food, cleaning, heating, plants that need watering. But, although there is a surface of realism in TWO, this is constantly undermined by the simple fact that nothing of what they describe is actually present. What is there is the stage reality, although,

again, what the characters are looking for is located elsewhere)

while the Woman, who is now out of the cage and completely visible to us, with her wig and the white chalk on the face, is clearly someone very old and helpless, and makes very little sense, as when she puts lipstick on the wooden horse's mouth. Indeed, she is an old woman that seems to suffer from a condition such as dementia

(and thus, the fragmentation in the language, the repetition of words and phrases and conversations, as well as Woman's persistence to remember a poem or to find a letter which we aren't even sure existed in the first place, are all explained as a condition of old age, ramblings of a dysfunctional mind. This is indeed a complete re-writing of TWO. Considering everything I've seen so far, namely the grotesque Nurse who looks like a guard in a clinic, the cage, the bunch of heavy keys, and also the abrupt, fast speech, I now think that we are meant to understand that everything we see is a glimpse inside the mind of an old person with dementia, a person who feels imprisoned by its own dysfunctional brain, and who is desperately trying to get hold of some long-forgotten memories. This also explains why the director, who at first wanted to make sure that a different performer will play the parts of Maia and Woman so that we, as the audience, will know right away that they are not the same person, has now kept the same performer for both parts: and thus Maia's monologue in ONE has somehow become Woman's past.)

And then, there is darkness. The two women of TWO disappear somewhere at the back of the stage. The speaking figures of THREE, Judy and Laura, come in as voices via microphones, mixed with stretched sound. It is difficult to make out all the words.

(indeed this is something the characters say in the play, that they can't make out the words exchanged between the landlord and Father, and thus reinforce our sense that they are in fact improvising the scene. But here, what is the purpose of not being able to make out the

words of the characters who say that they cannot make out other characters' words? Is it some sort of irony?)

The voices gradually get closer, and become clearer, while the noise gets softer and eventually stops. There is now a very dim light coming from the 'moon' above the stage – there is the shape of a deep orange moon made by the lights. There is also a strange shape on the floor in front of the cage

(is it supposed to be Woman sleeping? Strangely, this is the reverse of the text; while THREE gradually turns into a fairytale, here we start with the fairytalish world, only to end up with the image of the old woman on the floor, sleeping in front of her cage, again as the single 'real' character of this play. In THREE it is up to the audience to get a sense of the scene as a performance – or not. But here, the voices via the microphones openly give the sense of performance from the beginning, although we don't know who these voices are. Maybe they are supposed to be inside Woman's head.)

while towards the end of the scene there is proper lightning and the two performers appear, holding microphones: they have transformed themselves into two young women, who wear clothes of the 1940s and proper make-up. The ping-pong game of words is here conducted by quietly speaking out the words while placing paper slips with the words typed on them on overhand projectors. The written words are projected on the wall. When the game of words reaches its end, one of the performers is screaming

(part of the grotesque aesthetic, as we are supposed to be experiencing the Woman's nightmare, I assume. But then I realize that the scream serves another purpose as well: in the play, it is not the story itself but the language that takes over, in that ping pong game of words, and eventually gets out of control and destroys the story itself, as well as Lucas, leaving the two characters on stage, empty-handed. But in this staging, as far as I can tell, the

disappearance of Lucas is not connected with the language and the game of words, but with the story: something horrible is supposed to have happened just there, at the back of the stage at which one of the performers is staring, which has caused Lucas to disappear: and having seen it, she screams. As it seems, in this stage performance we stick with the fairytale through to the end.)

The two performers finish their lines and disappear again at the back of the stage. They reappear in the exact same outfits, as Kora and Elsie of FOUR. Now, their outfits fit their secretarial manners: they have little desks and typewriters, in which they write obituaries. A rabbit soft toy is on top of Kora's typewriters

(and so the rabbit of Lucas' magic performance in the next part, FIVE, has turned here into a joke. Clearly, this carefree borrowing of images and ideas from one part of the play and throwing them in another random place, cut off from their original context, is a major directing technique in this staging.)

part of the weird, dreamlike aesthetic. The element of the grotesque is evident here as well, as the two women use exaggerated acting manners as well as clothes that include strange details. The speech, however, is for the first time given a natural rhythm. Now Kora breastfeeds the rabbit soft toy and later on, she exchanges a passionate kiss with Elsie.

(If I would make a guess, I would say that the inspiration for the kiss possibly comes from Stephen Daldry's film *The Hours*. In my previous encounters with the director and the creative team, I was surprised to find out that discussions on this production included not so much a theatrical vocabulary and references to plays, or any stage work for that matter, but mainly references to films.)

The scene finishes with Kora crying uncontrollably while she is hanging polaroid photos on a clothesline.

(I have no idea where this comes from. But, although I still don't know why we are in the 1940s, and I cannot make sense of various images such as the ones mentioned above, for the first time I feel that there is some agreement between the text and the staging, or at least that the staging is not directly antagonistic to the play: the words are allowed to be heard. In FOUR, the characters admit that reality does not come with meaning, and thus fiction – or the theatrical stage – is needed to soothe and comfort us, and perhaps make life seem a little less arbitrary. But FIVE overturns this; for in FIVE we find the answer of who Lucas is: he is the theatre-maker, but his theatre is that of the mind. What we have been searching for all along is the real, but the real is only seen by those who can see it. Of course, I know already that most of FIVE has been cut. And while I wait)

Again we see Woman of TWO, preparing herself, playing with objects. The text of FIVE, or what is left of it, is delivered through the recorded voice of a child. The girl's voice reads both Evi's and Vivi's parts, but it is split in two via sound spatialization, creating a doubling effect. On the stage, Woman is looking at various photos as they are projected on a bed sheet that is hanging from the clothesline. Some of them are pictures of a child, a young girl

(so perhaps these photos of the girl are supposed to be Woman herself as a child. It is her own past she is looking at in those photos, while the bits from FIVE are supposed to be memories from her life as a young girl. Which also means that the scene from the 1940s we saw earlier could be something from her past, for instance when she was working as a secretary writing obituaries – and that could be an invented memory. What is becoming clear to me, however, is that what I'm watching on stage is the life of a single woman who is suffering from dementia and is throughout the play trying to gather the pieces of her life through memory or imagination – and thus, what we have been watching is a projection of her

mind, which resembles a nightmare. Needless to say, this has nothing to do with the play I have written and been discussing in this thesis.)

And the Nurse appears, and we are now in SIX.

(Surprisingly, the director has indeed kept the swapping of roles I'm suggesting in the Notes of the play. So the performer who was doing Woman's part earlier is now Nurse, and the one we knew as Nurse is now Woman. I'm not quite sure why the director kept the swapping, though. Since the play's intention has totally changed and we are now watching the life of a single woman, it seems to me that the only reason this swapping is retained is that the director found it an appealing idea.)

And again, there are fast, abrupt exchanges between the characters

(and this is another surprise, given that SIX consists of a series of fragmented monologues, which give the impression of one figure being a projection of the other. But here the monologues have somehow been wrapped together, creating a sense of coerced interaction, while again fragmentation is interpreted as the failing state of Woman)

without beats and pauses, apart from only a few rare moments of silence, in which Woman is pushing a bunch of polaroid photos inside her nappy. Later on, she takes the wooden horse out of the cage and slowly walks with it. She then puts it on the desk and lies beside it. Nurse is, however, different from her previous appearance: she has lost the posture of the guard of a mental hospital and is more like a nightshift nurse, worried for her patient, especially at the moment when she thinks that Woman has just died

(which I find rather confusing. Perhaps the first Nurse was an image constructed inside Woman's disturbed mind, while this is the 'real' Nurse, and we are not inside Woman's head anymore but in the real world)

and suddenly the two performers grab two chairs and sit at the very front of the stage, and deliver the text of SEVEN, in a very fast, rhythmic way, smiling at each other at times or looking straight ahead at the audience. Sometimes they say the lines together; other times one completes the phrase of the other. And this fast, neat voice performance is followed by a blackout

(and this seems like an entirely separate piece that suddenly pops up out of the blue, carrying a secret meaning of its own. However, I'm certainly admiring the technically elaborate performance of the two actresses.)

Black.

Further Notes:

1. Clearly the play was used as material for this production. Its structures were violated, its gestures – such as the proposed relationship with the audience, closely connected with the play's multiple voices – were ignored, the feminist nuances were wiped out, while the focus was on the making of stage images, many of which represented easily identifiable scenes from films. The staging seemed to employ a grotesque aesthetic which, although well-made and entertaining and even impressive at times, was used to hide the absence of any serious thinking on the play, its meanings, its gestures, its intentions. The performance also seemed to rely on a series of jokes carefully planted in order to direct the audience away from the problem of inconsistencies and meaning in this staging.

2. Apart from my investigating efforts as an audience member, I also discovered other indicators which suggested that my reading of this staging was indeed accurate: a theatre's dramaturge had, early on, admitted that he had read the play as dealing with dementia; in her interview to the local newspaper, the director, while implying a smooth collaboration with the writer, stated that *Lucas and Time* is an experimental play, which may or may not be about dementia. And, in his greeting speech at the party after the show, the theatre's artistic director expressed the view that whether the play is about the life of one woman or about many lives doesn't really matter at all. When I later asked in writing if the director or dramaturges would like to send me the concept of this staging and explain the director's reading of the play for the purposes of this thesis, neither the director nor the dramaturges replied – although I did receive a reply from the theatre, which expressed the view that my criticism was due to my ignorance of the practice of theatre and that the director had discovered new aspects in my play that I was unaware of. The theatre believed that my criticism was also an emotional reaction to the cutting of FIVE; these reactions are common when text is cut, or a costume, which is close to the designer's heart, is left out. This comment reminded me of Lehmann's insistence that the play should be placed equally next to the other elements of the performance, such as the costumes or the lights (Lehmann, 2006).

3. It seemed to me that both reviewers, one from the local newspaper and the other from *Theater der Zeit*, did not read the play, although it is common practice to do so in Germany when world premieres are involved (also because the play is usually not available in printed form to the audience, and thus the reviewer is understood to explain aspects of it not represented in the performance). They also failed to mention the cuts – while mentioning any cuts is a common practice when it comes to new plays – although this was mentioned in the programme, as introduction to FIVE, which was included in it. Both reviewers stayed in a neutral terrain: the reviewer of the local newspaper avoided writing about the play altogether (there was a first version of this review online, which was very flattering about the play, without however getting into any sort of analysis of it. There was also some hint of criticism about the directing. All comments on the play, plus the hint about the directing, were cut in the second version of it, which appeared a few hours later and also in print the next day). The reviewer of *Theater der Zeit* thought that the play and the directing were in a perfect union. She also claimed that the inspiration for the writing of the play had been Ted Hughes' poem.

4. Interestingly, the programme of the production, with me speaking about *Lucas and Time* in an interview with the dramaturg, and also a dramaturgical text which was based on my own writings for the play (also published in *Theater Haute*), was presenting a completely different story from the staging. All things considered, I think the director mainly worked in a devising fashion and afterwards invented a concept that would justify the problem of meaning and inconsistencies. The concept of the old woman suffering from dementia is indeed a convenient one: in this dysfunctional brain, anything goes. Undoubtedly, the director could have done half of the play, or throw in three more plays, or five film scripts, and it all would have made sense, exactly as in a dream.

5. In the end, I think that the fundamental problem of this staging was its refusal to take responsibility, not just for the text, but also for the audience, who were kept at arm's length throughout the performance so that they would not question what they saw on stage. In the

event of confessing their confusion, the audience would have to question their own ability to comprehend. (I don't mean that the play takes responsibility for what the audience will see and feel, but that it takes responsibility about what it is, namely its own intentions, meanings, processes, gestures. This is something that the staging refused to do; there seemed to be a complete lack of an inward look.) This is connected, I think, with how this staging dealt with emotion: for, while the play does not speak about emotion but rather functions as a mechanism for the audience to explore their own feelings, in this staging emotion was something illustrated on the stage and ridiculed, rejected, turned into a joke. The director attempted to rely on already known images and stereotypes, in order to obtain access to ready-made meanings, borrowed from film – unsuccessfully, though, as images here were deprived of subtext, and were therefore unable to 'speak'. Ultimately, what we saw on stage was not the psyche of dementia; it was, the way I understood it, an unconscious reflection of a postmodernist mindset that avoids engaging either with the play or with the audience but rather opts for a frivolous and yet conservative repackaging of old drama.

6. The theatre chose for its advertising campaign (printed cards, pages on social media) a phrase from the play, typed in capital letters against a yellow background: 'TYPOGRAPHISCHE FEHLER KONNEN WEHTUN', namely 'Typographical errors can hurt'. (It is from FOUR, where the name Lucas appears as a typographical error.) I wrote the phrase as a kind of an internal joke, and as a warning as well: often actors I worked with had the tendency to replace the words of the text with their own, and, in the productions of my plays that I directed myself, I always struggled to force them out of this habit. In the context of this specific production, the phrase can be seen, I suppose, as a fine example of irony.

7. In 2007, 200 people in Germany (writers, academics, reviewers, dramaturges, artistic directors among them), wrote an open letter about the conditions of production of new plays in the country's state theatres, identifying a series of problems: new plays rarely got a second staging, they were presented on the smaller stages and in a limited number of performances, they were assigned to young, non-experienced directors; playwrights were treated as 'fresh

meat', they were exploited by being paid ridiculously low fees as if they were trainees, they were refused participation in the production of their plays. The letter stressed the need for a public debate on issues of production and wondered about the future of German theatre without new plays. Almost ten years later, not much seems to have changed.

To sum up (and leaving aside all political and ethical implications derived from Stadttheater Osnabrück's decision to breech all agreements concerning the integrity of the play and deny the playwright the right to define her own work as a play and not as material for a show):

1. *Lucas and Time* is a play about theatricality, narration, time. It engages with the question of existence through the appearing and disappearing acts of a number of speaking figures, different in each of its seven parts. The play's language – a language of theatricality, narration, time – suggests that the universe of the play is a theatre of the mind. In stark contrast, the director decided to erase the multiplicity of voices and create a main "real" character, an old person who suffers from dementia: this character, inspired by the speaking figure in the play indicated as Woman, is reconstructed as a protagonist and reshaped according to the principles of conventional dramatic writing, in opposition to the aesthetic and philosophical propositions of the play. Thus, she has a past (for instance, Maia's monologue in ONE is turned into her own memories of herself as a young woman, Vivi and Evi in FIVE become her own voice as a child) and dominates all chapters of the play, which is a violation of the rules and logic of the play and thus a completely different construction; for in *Lucas and Time*, the speaking figures only exist for as long as their words last, never after the end of their scene, creating a vision of language and human existence that experiences its own limits, its end. The only element in the play that returns in all parts of the play is the name Lucas, who never appears as a physical presence. By creating her own protagonist, however, the director has also cancelled the meaning and function of the main device which I call Lucas in the play.

2. If Lucas is now cancelled, so is time, in the ways time is explored in the play – ontologically, philosophically, theatrically, through narrative reconfigurations. In the director's version, time is divided between real time and dream time. Real time includes the director's protagonist, the old woman who suffers from dementia, in the present, as she struggles to cope with everyday things, or to remember parts of her past. In dream time, the protagonist experiences a distorted version of reality caused by dementia. Here we find all the parts of the play that the director could not use as representations of her protagonist's past or present. They are turned into a nightmarish world, imaginings of a troubled mind; they don't make sense precisely for the reason that they are creations of a dysfunctional brain. Their explanation lies in an external condition, a typical illness of old age, and they have no meaning in themselves; consequently, they could be replaced by any other texts, without this disturbing the director's construction.

3. In addition to distorting the play's ideas, themes, meanings and form and rendering most part of the play meaningless, and therefore replaceable, the director proceeded to actual cuts, namely most of FIVE, changed the monologues of SIX into dialogues (which caused a chain of effects, including cancelling out the intention that the monological form itself carries within it), and dismantled the structural patterns of the play, mainly by removing elements from one part of the play and placing them in another. All these changes altered, erased or rendered the gestures of the play irrelevant. For example, if Maia in ONE mentions that she has three things on her mind of which, however, she shares only one, it is to announce that this is a theatre of the mind and thus initiate a game: the audience is invited to participate and discover the other two things themselves (and thus make their own connections with the Voices' guessing game at the final chapter, SEVEN).

Perhaps this example could be seen as paradigmatic of the experience of the playwright in the country in which the postdramatic theory originated. However, my intention for discussing this production of *Lucas and Time* at Stadttheater Osnabrück

is rather to illustrate what the claims of the postdramatic theory mean practically for the relationship between play and stage, arguing that the fact that the postdramatic theatre's focus 'is no longer on the questions whether and how the theatre "corresponds to" the text' but on 'whether and how the texts are suitable material for the realization of a theatrical project' (Lehmann, 2006:56) exposes, in my view, the stage as a place of violence; for the subjugation of the play's meanings, forces and gestures by the directing design, that inevitably occurs when the play is treated as material, suggests to the spectator a model of hegemony and power as the postdramatic theatre's founding principle, as its politics. In addition, I discuss this production to show that the practices and attitudes of the postdramatic theatre do not necessarily work towards satisfying the postdramatic theory's proclaimed goals, namely to manifest the stage as non-theological and to allow the spectator to become co-author of the work, but more likely achieve the opposite.

To explain this second point I take on Roland Barthes' classification of texts as readerly (*le visible*) and writerly (*le scriptible*), as proposed in his work *S/Z*. In it, the readerly text is perceived as a product meant for consumption. It appears to be a text decidable, unified into a coherent whole based on the signified; it is a realist text, not in the sense that it represents an external reality, but because it is tied to a network of literary and cultural codes: as Michael Moriarty explains, it is not reality that the readerly text copies but existing artistic or literary representations, for the readerly text's referential code (a network of stereotypes) is cultural, and does not originate in the author (1991:131). This necessarily means that readerly texts 'cannot give knowledge. They cannot impart any new truth about the world, for they are intelligible only in virtue of what is already known' (ibid.:135).

In contrast, the writerly text allows the reader to shift from being consumer of the text to producer of it: in other words, it invites the reader to rewrite the text through the activity of reading. 'The text of this type', notes Moriarty, 'resists being appropriated by paraphrase or critical commentary because it escapes conventional categories of genre, and hence cannot be read as representation, cannot even be reduced to a structure' (ibid.:118). According to Barbara Johnson, Barthes speaks of a text that is 'open to the free play of signifiers and of difference, unconstrained by representative considerations, and transgressive of any desire for decidable, unified, totalized meaning' (1978:4).

But the distinction between readerly and writerly text is also about the process of structuration involved in the activity of reading. In *S/Z,* Barthes takes a readerly text, Balzac's classic story *Sarrazine*, and through a style of reading which he calls 'transcription' (Moriarty, 1991:138), he attempts to show ways in which the reader could perhaps rewrite the text as a writerly one.

The theorists of the postdramatic understand the new dramatic play (which they consider to be postdramatic) as a writerly text: for instance, in her Introduction of Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, Karen Jürs-Munby refers to plays I discuss in this thesis (including plays by Müller, Jelinek, Kane and Crimp) as 'open' or 'writerly', which require spectators to become active co-writers (2006:6). The example of the production of *Lucas and Time* at Stadttheater Osnabrück, however, shows how the director, following the demand to break free from the authority of the text, in fact turned the writerly text into a readerly one. As argued earlier, in this particular staging *Lucas and Time* was reshaped to fit the principles of conventional dramatic writing (having given a main character and a plot) and was presented as realist theatre, while the play's "deviations" found justification as fabrications of the main character's dysfunctional brain. The staging relied on the creation of images borrowed from popular films and thus revealed a referential code that did not originate in the director-author, but copied already-made artistic representations. As a consequence, the play's invitation to the audience to participate in the meaning-making was effectively cancelled: instead of

becoming producer of the (performance) text, the spectator was confined in the role of the consumer.

In my discussion on the new dramatic play, I argued that it asks the audience to take a position and seek their own acts of resistance. I think Barthes' activity of reading, through which the reader becomes producer of the text, is a similar one, not least because there is work involved in the task. In *S/Z*, Barthes explains that single reading does not guarantee that the reader will move beyond the stereotype: rather, Barthes' activity of reading is actually "rereading":

> Rereading, an operation contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society, which would have us "throw away" the story once it has been consumed ("devoured"), so that we can then move on to another story, buy another book, and which is tolerated only in certain marginal categories of readers (children, old people, and professors), rereading is here suggested at the outset, for it alone saves the text from repetition (those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere).
>
> (1974:15-16)

Although Lehmann's principal suggestion is that the postdramatic theatre allows the spectator to become co-author of the work, responsible for the meaning-making, unlike Barthes he does not set any requirements for the spectator. Rather, it is assumed that the nature of the postdramatic theatre itself is what "activates" the spectator: this is because the activity of reading (or rereading) the new dramatic play in the postdramatic theatre is, in fact, already performed by the director, who assumes, through this mediation, the position of authority.

'The stage is theological' says Derrida, 'for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance' (1978: 235).

Although it is the playwright that Derrida has in mind, who 'absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watching over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of the representation' (ibid.), the creator of the directing design cannot escape Derrida's charge; for, as Philip Auslander argues, what Derrida calls "a primary logos" also applies to the director's concept or the actor's "self" (2002:29). As in the example of the staging of *Lucas and Time* discussed above, it was the director that reshaped the play and imposed a coherent whole, effectively 'closing the writing', to use Barthes' phrase from *The Death of the Author* (1977:147).

On the other hand, Liz Tomlin argues that, as long as the theatrical site is constructed in such a way as to defer to the play, regardless of whether this is considered to be a readerly or a writerly text (Tomlin gives the example of Howard Barker's work, which she asserts as multiple, proposing indeterminate meanings), still the performance itself will remain theological, 'a secondary copy, or repetition, of the text' (2013:61). This is part of the argument that Derrida makes in *Writing and Difference*: he claims that the representation of any pre-written work divides the performance, as present event, from itself, and thus compromises the theatre's status as a live medium (1978:237).

'The last half-century of theater and performance scholarship has exhibited a kind of selective amnesia when it comes to Derrida's critique, now acknowledging and now forgetting that "presence" is a problematic term', observes Julia Jarcho (2017:4). She points out that it is Derrida himself who exposes the problem with the notion of "presence" as one that can only be accessible through its opposite, representation: 'Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been penetrated' (cited in Jarcho, 2017:4). Jarcho agrees with Cormac Power's assertion, that 'the spatial, temporal, corporeal, and intersubjective dimensions of theater always produce at least the potential to call our attention to the present as present, even or especially when it also exposes that present as "a function of signification"' (cited in Jarcho, 2017:7) and argues that 'a theater that seeks to displace us from the site where we are, but not toward a second,

imitative present, is neither a theater of presence nor a theater of representation. It might, however, be a theater of writing' (ibid.:7-8).

My own defence of the new dramatic play as theatre in its own terms focuses on the play's constellation of gestures, which circumvent, I think, the issue of "presence"; for gestures necessarily unfold in present time, not as an imitation of an act that has already happened but always directed to each individual reader/spectator. As argued in this thesis, it is the play's textual integrity, as a network of forms and mechanisms that are necessarily theatrical (in the sense that they are directed to the audience), that retains these gestures and renders them visible. The new dramatic play demands a "rereading": it requires attention, time, openness. It asks for friendship – a theme I will be exploring in the next chapter. The gesture of friendship indicates that the answer to the question how the play and the stage can perform together has to be answered individually, for every individual text and every staging, and thus advocates against theory's attempt to regulate the relationship between play and stage beforehand.

The following text was included in the programme of the production of *Lucas and Time* in George Cadbury Hall (Birmingham University), which premiered in March 2017. The director Adam Ledger writes: 'The paradox at the heart of the play is that to be an individual is also to acknowledge our connections. If the imagination of the solo mind is an answer to comprehending *Lucas and Time*, then how to act and experience it together is its question.' It seems to me that what the director saw as the paradox at the heart of the play also speaks of my own investigation into the new dramatic play and its place on the contemporary stage.

'A word, a phrase, a title, a name, a place': on Lucas and Time

Director's note: Adam Ledger[34]

Time is against me. I am to do a production and haven't made a final choice of a play. I ask Niki, 'Do you have anything?' She sends *Lucas and Time.* My first impression is the language. It is poetic. It loops and repeats. It is dense. It is full of charged images. It is full of lists. It is also quite hard. But it has never been performed in English. So I choose to do its premiere and with the fewest number of actors I can.

Lucas and Time is structured in seven scenes (Niki calls them chapters). Each is a separate world, peopled by its own set of characters. The play creates each narrative, then tears each down. Thwarted by the lack of an overall plot, what we need to ask, first, is who might the 'Lucas' in each section be. I make a list: Lucas is

a lover
the (dis)appearance of a poem
a little boy
a typographical (or at least verbal) error
a magician
the host of a party who never appears

To try to piece together a satisfying story to link it all together – to make the "book" of the chapters – may well be seductive, but is not what is asked or what this play is about. So the point of *Lucas and Time* is that it becomes a theatre of the mind. That of each individual spectator.

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What connects the scenes is a consciously theatrical, dense weave of images, themes and ideas, which echo each other across the possible worlds, held together in a fabric of sometimes audacious language. Such mirroring also appears in the role reversal of the (Genet or Beckett-like) Woman and her carer, Nurse, in scenes two and six, something mirrored across other scenes too due to circumstances of casting, lending further peculiar resonances.

Yet as the title implies, time is ever present here: not just the past or future, and never of specific history, but a troubled present in which time has slowed down, jumps, loops, or has stood still. Or it might not exist at all. The play also concerns timing and the measuring of time: the script is full of beats and pauses, tempi, repetitions. The characters imagine they hear clocks as they construct their own internal illogic. Or they don't know what time it is.

Niki sends me her own writings about the play, which I share with the cast. She describes her writerly improvisation, starting with finding Ted Hughes' poem *Visit* from the collection *Birthday Letters*:

Lucas, my friend, one
Among those three or four who stay unchanged
Like a separate self,
A stone in the bed of the river
Under every change, became your friend

From this creative accident, she describes how an object or idea in one scene triggered the writing of the next. These images also thread throughout the play as groupings: people, animals, objects (a letter is important), food, buildings and flowers. The image of water also pervades the text. It is full of love and romance. And as a cast, we discuss how the play is very female. We like that Lucas, the man, is the name of what is not there. The writer's improvisation mirrors the improvisation of the play's form, itself sometimes peopled by characters spinning stories. This is an act of theatre, of performing: and so I say to David,

‘Let’s not do theatre where we are pretending.’ So the white box is obviously a set; a box of, perhaps, the mind also, in which multiple things occur and then can disappear. We can see the actors offstage and we can see the operators change lights and make sounds happen.

But to perform *Lucas and Time* means also to acknowledge that it disappears bit by bit each time. Niki’s writing about the play refers to the philosophical idea of “horizons” of being; if we are truly alive, then we acknowledge also our ageing and death. (I write down, ‘in living our landscapes, we must tip over our horizons’). The themes of ageing, disappearance and of loss start to haunt the play’s content and the actuality of its own performance. The sometimes daringly put language, the daring of its imagination, itself starts to fail.

The paradox at the heart of the play is that to be an individual is also to acknowledge our connections. If the imagination of the solo mind is an answer to comprehending *Lucas and Time*, then how to act and experience it together is its question. As a play, event and idea about the world, *Lucas and Time* offers the making and unmaking of a dramaturgy of existence.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

When I began writing this thesis,

I had already spent a few years reading, or half reading, or just piling up books borrowed from the library, or bought on a hunch; and some of these books remained always visible, while others were for a long time forgotten under stacks of printed articles, or loose sheets of paper with handwritten notes, most of them in an awkward mixture of English and Greek and containing random drawings. Apart from these notes (which, in the end, I got rid of without reading), I had also written a few papers for conferences: one became part of this thesis, another was lost forever when my laptop was stolen on the Paris Metro, and a couple more were eventually pushed aside by other, more urgent thoughts. And I also wrote fragments of chapters or almost chapters; some parts of these found a place in this thesis, some were lost with that laptop: among them was, as I recall, an extensive draft that discussed Paul Ricoeur's notion of the living metaphor. Perhaps this thesis, then, would have taken different paths if accidents were not involved in the process of this research. But accidents were part of it, and so was going after things – books, ideas, phrases, images, performances – that got my attention even if they seemed, more often than not, irrelevant to my project.

But even before these papers and lost chapters and random notes, I wrote some other stuff – two essays, to be precise, written during the first year of my research. The first we can all forget about, but the second turned out to be quite important for this thesis. In that second essay, I was discussing a play of mine, *Leaves*, a part of which I had presented as rehearsed reading at the university, as part of an event which included both papers and performances. After writing the essay, which took a considerable amount of time, I decided to discard it, for two major issues had emerged. The first had to do with the language: on the one hand, the writing style of the essay was a rather unimaginative, old-fashioned academic style that did

not connect with the language of the play and could, therefore, only speak about the play in very specific ways.

The other issue was that the use of a certain vocabulary, and the larger theoretical framework in which this vocabulary belonged to, created another barrier between the play and the essay. This larger framework was Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic theatre, which had been extremely helpful to me during the writing of my MPhil dissertation the year before. For, having found myself in an environment where the only logical and valid sort of play was the social-realist play, Lehmann's theory showed itself as a deus ex machina and, ultimately, saved the day. That was because it provided me with a vocabulary and a way of thinking that allowed me to both speak about the play I had written as part of that course, *Odds and Clocks*, in a persuasive way, and also to place it *somewhere*. But in the process of writing the essay on *Leaves*, I became increasingly uncomfortable with its claims, for the postdramatic theatre's fabric was limiting or even contradicting my own experience as the writer of the piece: for example, I was arguing for the 'un-structuring of time', whereas as a writer I knew well that what I was actually doing very much involved the structuring of time. (And this goes for all my work, including *Lucas and Time*, whose chapters could be read as narrative reconfigurations of time.) The only way forward, then, was to throw away that essay and start again, even if starting again meant finding myself in a place that, at the time, seemed like a void.

And then, it was the question of practice itself. For this was meant to be practice-led research, but what did this really mean? To bring in my own work and examine it from the assumed superior position of theory was a poor idea; besides, surely the whole idea of practice-led research involved not just the work but also the knowledge, and even the uncertainties, of practice: uncertainties that could problematize theoretical positions and knowledge that would not necessarily satisfy the academic demand of presenting 'evidence' – which, indeed, led me to question the notion of evidence itself in this thesis. This research project became for me, then, also an investigation into how practice and theory could perform together, what sort of

layers or unseen possibilities this engagement would bring to the surface, or what sort of inner spaces it could open for the reader (and for myself as a reader, too). Reflecting on the process of writing this thesis as I went along, and also looking back at it now, I have the sense of a movement that mirrors that of *Lucas and Time*: questions, discussions, interlocutors come into view, creating various constellations, planting seeds and tracing places for return; for their departure is already marked by their anticipated reappearance as part of another constellation, of another angle of an argument.

And perhaps, if I am now speaking of an absent essay – an essay that nobody has ever seen and could very well be another invention – it is because the play has made it possible for me, through its own engagement with absent characters, or poems that cannot be remembered. And if this movement between things that are present and absent things is the internal condition of the play, a condition which renders it open to transformation and allows it to be perceived as a landscape of possibilities, then this movement is also, I think, this thesis' internal condition, one that allows it fluidity and enables its chapters to develop through shifting mechanisms and form distinct shapes, each connecting with the next, and with the thesis as a whole, in both obvious and imperceptible ways.

This movement, then, is not just about

how the writing (thesis, play) carries itself, and what sort of architectures it presents us with. It is also about the time it takes to manifest itself. Time is significant, for it hints at another kind of relationship with the writing that looks beyond the question of what the writing itself is doing, or what I (as a writer, or a reader, or a spectator) am doing with it.

When I was asked, during my interview for the upgrade to the doctoral status, what a doctoral

thesis is, I could only come up with a short and apparently unsatisfying answer: that it is a long project. This was probably perceived as referring to length in terms of word count or number of pages, but what I had in mind was actually time. If I'm writing a play in order to understand what a play is, it is because the question cannot be answered, certainly not fully, by anticipating what the play will do, or what the play will allow us to do with it, but rather by experiencing being with it.

Riddles are among the things that the anonymous guests engage with in the social gathering that takes place in the final chapter of *Lucas and Time*: they drink wine, they play games, they put forward ontological questions. It is only suitable, I think, to invite, in this final part of this thesis, a few more voices and a few more riddles. Following, again, a hunch, I became interested in the philosopher Alexander Nehamas' latest book, in which he asks: what is friendship? In *On Friendship* (2016), Nehamas defines friendships as 'being together rather than doing something together: that is surely part of what distinguishes friends from mere acquaintances and people from whom we expect something specific' (2016:88).

Nehamas' investigation begins, naturally, with Aristotle, whose notion of friendship, namely that it is a flawless sort of love, is still dominant in the domain of philosophy. Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of *philia*: the first two imply incidental relationships that involve some sort of gain or pleasure, but the third one is solely based on arête, that is virtue, and therefore must be flawless. Nehamas brings in theory, personal experience and observations on representations of friendship in art, in order to propose instead that friendship is 'an irreducible experience between two souls', and that we don't necessarily love our friends for their virtue but 'for themselves'.

What does it mean, though, to love our friends 'for themselves'? Questioning this concept further, Nehamas concludes that in fact 'friendship, like every kind of love, requires more than an appreciation of what we already know our friends to be. It also makes a commitment to the

future' (2016:134). And this is why friendship is notoriously difficult to define: it involves both the present and the future, and thus escapes our efforts to pin it down with any certainty. In Nehamas' words,

> Every explanation is disappointedly thin. They all contain an implicit 'And so on', an open end or ellipsis that reveals that the friendship is still alive. It is when this ellipsis disappears, when we feel that we know exactly why we are attracted to someone and that our future together will be just like our past, that we are in fact no longer attracted to them.
>
> (2016:135)

Loving our friends for themselves, thus, means also anticipating what we ourselves will become because of our relationship with them. If I write a play, then, to understand what a play is, as I argued in this thesis, it is because of this movement, which has not just to do with the structures and mechanisms that are produced during the process of its writing, and the things these structures and mechanisms can possibly do. For, surely, they can do things, such as pointing out different ways of making theatre, or thinking about politics, or understanding how language works. But, beyond all that, there is my own relationship with the play, which shows itself through time, and which cannot be defined beforehand because, as Nehamas would say, it is an irreducible experience, unique in each case, as unique as the relationship we have with each of our friends. This movement, then, involves both the present and the future, and contains within the promise that the movement itself, even after the play is written, will not give out but, on the contrary, will persist and will continue to transform both the play and the writer. This movement is what generates the seeds for the next plays to come; and it is again this movement that keeps open the inner spaces that the play has created for the reader, or the spectator, making them also part of this process, which is plural, and filled with possibility, and is unrestrained.

Being with the play is what generates the desire to understand what the play is. And if the thesis is part of that same gesture, then the thesis itself is originating further writing. When I started this research, I was objecting to this idea, perhaps because of what that early essay

had taught me, namely that, if the postdramatic theory was lending me a language to use and a place to belong to, it came, however, at a price. It meant that it would also, to some extent, control and mould the work itself. I therefore took the opposite direction, thinking of a thesis that would speak about the play only in ways that the play itself would permit. But this relationship between the play, the thesis and myself turned out to be more complex than I had imagined, for, inevitably, the thesis became part of the movement that I described above. And while the starting point for my explorations every time was my thinking as a practitioner, and while my engagement with theory felt like taking the longest walk in the woods only to find myself, in the end, back where I started (albeit with a clearer head and a few more tools in my pocket), perhaps I didn't end up in the same place after all, but in a place slightly to the side. I don't know how the writing of this thesis will affect the writing I will do in the future, but I do know now that my being with it is not unlike Nehamas' grasp of friendship, and that it will not expire with this chapter's final lines.

And so, in the end, the question is not how the play is made,

even less what the play is about, but what the play is. For me, this question is not unlike the one asked earlier, namely what it means to love our friends for themselves: 'When our relationship […] is not instrumental, when love is involved, I actually *don't* know what I want from you, and it isn't clear which features of yours account for my love', says Nehamas (2016:113; original emphasis). For the sort of play I'm discussing in this thesis, which I call a new dramatic play, does not offer itself to incidental relationships. It's not only that gain or pleasure are not guaranteed (although nothing is guaranteed when it comes to the arts, one would think – but, to a great extent, theatre has defined itself as the place of gain and pleasure): it's that they are not even part of the offer that is being made. The question, therefore, cannot be answered in terms of impact, and whether the reader or the spectator is entertained, or informed about new (or old) arguments on politics, or ethics, or introduced to a certain aesthetic style, is not really what the gesture of the new dramatic play is about.

The new dramatic play cannot be described beforehand in any conclusive way: it can only be recognized, and that requires a certain commitment, also in terms of time. And, perhaps, any attempt to describe it is inevitably linked to our experience at being with it at a specific moment, reflecting our various degrees of involvement. In the course of this thesis, I spoke of the new dramatic play as a text that is aware of the fact that it is a theatre text, one that invents and explores its own sense of theatricality; a text that brings the stage and the page together through the workings of the inner spectator; a text that utilizes various processes and techniques such as improvisation; a text that incorporates the presence of the performer, as well as the presence of the audience, making shifting constellations; a text that relocates within the tragic as a conflict between the individual and the collective; a text that tries to make sense of its own predicament and come up with acts of resistance. To be with the play is to be attracted by it, for reasons that may remain, to a great extent, unknown even to ourselves. In the same way, the new dramatic play will be alien to those who are not instinctively drawn to it.

One could suggest, then, that it is pointless to speak about something that ultimately looks like a matter of personal taste. Therefore, one question is pertinent: what is really at stake and for whom? To answer this, I need to return to my discussion about the difference between the play and a performance text, as took place in the second chapter of this thesis, where I pointed out that the performance text is written as part of a larger text that includes the stage not as a concept but as an actual thing that sets its own demands and constraints and essentially conditions the text, while the new dramatic play is composed around the concept of the stage that is fabricated by the play itself and thus belongs to the universe of the play.

But then, what is the relationship of the new dramatic play with the actual stage? How do these two come together? At the time, I argued that the play can never exist as it is on the stage, simply because of the fact that the play is cut off from its textual presentation and

typography, and it is represented through certain bodies, voices and stage images. Should we just assume, then, that Lehmann is right and that the play cannot be considered but material for the stage? I opposed the idea of the play being mere raw material in itself, which implies a teleological way of thinking and sees the performance as the play's fulfilment. But, practically, how is the play to be understood and brought onto the actual stage?

As a practitioner, I always felt that there is something problematic in the way the relationship of the play with the stage was discussed every time. On the one hand, the claim of faithfulness to a text turns out to be more complex than is assumed: being attentive to the play's details and delivering every word without fail does not guarantee a faithful staging. And often, a somewhat freer approach may turn out to be more faithful to the spirit of the text, its meanings and gestures – for the play's mechanisms are not necessarily transferable on stage, and then other devices and workings have to be invented for the stage. On the other hand, considering the play as material for the stage meant avoiding seriously thinking about what the play is and what sort of theatre it proposes – and the recent production of *Lucas and Time* in the Stadttheater Osnabrück, which I have described at some length in this thesis, illustrates this point quite powerfully, I think.

What I am suggesting is that thinking on the relationship between the play and the stage in terms of faithfulness or whether the play is material for the stage or not doesn't do any good to either play or the stage, as it strips away the possibility of bringing the two together in a non-incidental relationship. That would require perhaps the invention of another language between them, one that would speak of the play and the stage as being together rather than just doing things together, allowing them to engage in a movement that involves both the present and the future, in the form of an implicit 'And so on'; this relationship between the stage and the play would aim to be an irreducible experience rather than rely on the application of the same standard processes and procedures, which are indifferent to this specificity of the play, and it would truly open up spaces for the spectator, making him/her also part of the process.

To return to my earlier question: what is at stake is not just about the play, but about the way we understand and make theatre: a way that fundamentally questions the usual way of doing things, which the operation of theatres as production venues is based on.

However, being together is not without risk.

Alexander Nehamas puts forward a further question: Is it possible that friendship is more vulnerable or fraught with risk than Aristotle imagined? Nehamas goes on to suggest that, although we cannot be friends with people we do not respect and admire, perhaps we love them not only, or not so much, for their virtues, but for their weaknesses. And while the philosophical thought has always insisted in defining friendship as a fundamental element of good life, following Aristotle's definition of it as a flawless sort of love, Nehamas argues that friendship 'need not be an inherently beneficial relationship or a moral good' (2016:95).

For, if anything, friendship is a celebration of individuality: the face of the friend is not an impersonal face, in the sense of a theoretical construction, but a specific other, a person, a unique individual. And this also highlights the fact that friendship is necessarily based on making distinctions, which cannot often be morally justified. Friendship does not rely on moral justification, and it may even lead us to non-moral acts, as, for instance, when we decide to favour our friend over a stranger in a situation in which it is not ethical to do so. 'Nonmoral values are and remain values – features without which life would be pointless, without variation, intricacy, intimacy, or joy', explains Nehamas, for they provide 'a justification of friendship that is independent of both its benefits and its moral or immoral features, and despite the pains, disappointments, and dangers it brings with it' (2016:225).

Nehamas' arguments are largely drawn from the arts, especially drama, for drama can provide us with representations of friendship, which is 'an embodied relationship, and its depictions require embodiment as well' (2016:179). He discusses Yasmina Reza's play *Art (*as well as Ridley Scott's film *Thelma and Louise)*, in order to argue 'that a good friendship can depend on immorality suggests very strongly that, whatever its value, friendship cannot be a moral virtue' (ibid.:196). While Nehamas doesn't fail to observe that the arts do not just offer us representations of friendship but also share some central features with it, and do play a role in who we become, his conviction that friendship is necessarily an embodied relationship leads him to an understanding of drama in terms of what drama can do, or what we can do with it.

Nehamas, therefore, does not attempt to confront a theatre text which offers no representation of friendship; he never explores the possibility that friendship could indeed take place as a non-embodied relationship, a movement, a being together with the text, not for some gain or pleasure but 'for itself'. I suspect that the reason he does not pursue further the idea that drama, and the arts in general, share some central features with friendship is because he ultimately sees friendship as something that belongs to the private sphere. While Aristotle thought of friendship as belonging to the public realm – early on in his work *Politics* we find friendship together with justice as the very foundations of polis – from the sixteenth century onwards friendship becomes more or less a private business. Nehamas observes that 'crucial to the removal of friendship from the public realm was the emergence of the market, which opened a gap between instrumental transactions on the one hand and personal relations on the other, setting interest and affection apart' (2016:48). Although he does mention that the political, and thus public, aspect of friendship has reemerged in some approaches, as in the thoughts of Adam Smith or Jacques Derrida, or of communitarian political philosophers and feminist writers, Nehamas argues that 'the usefulness of taking private friendship as a model for moral, political, or social relations more generally is limited' (ibid.:55).

Derrida's approach, in particular, as outlined in *The Politics of Friendship*, is that Aristotle's account of friendship is based on distinction, since friendship is something limited to those of privilege, and that it builds on the binary of friend and enemy. Derrida's own attempt is to articulate a new concept of friendship that could pave the way to a new inclusive model of democracy. Although Nehamas rightly asserts that Derrida's model lacks clarity, and points out that 'even if, unlikely as it is, the distinction between friend and enemy might one day be overcome, the contrast between those who are friends and whose who are not will not' (2016:52), Derrida's approach is of interest exactly because it relocates the concept of friendship in the public sphere, and because his notion of friendship is based on the concept of an impersonal face, which brings in mind 'the encounter with the Other', which Jean-Pierre Sarrazac places at the heart of the dramatic text, as the one feature of drama that allowed it to survive throughout time, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The encounter with the Other, according to Sarrazac, takes place on the stage and unfolds as a transformative process for the audience. This is by no means an original proposition: its roots are to be found in Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of alterity, according to which the self is to be understood in relation to the Other, the anonymous and unknowable other person, which represents for the self an infinite obligation, a limitless ethical responsibility. For Levinas, the inability to recognise and accept this responsibility towards the other would erase the self.

This ethical encounter provided theatre and performance with a new model for the relationship between performer and spectator: by emphasizing this encounter, theatre and performance formed an 'aesthetic of responsibility', which meant a focus on ethics and a search for practices that would bring the performer and the spectator into situations of collaboration and exchange. In these practices, as Nicholas Ridout notes (2009), we find the idea of the 'reactivation' of the audience, in the sense that the audience is encouraged to respond and take responsibility for making what is shown part of their personal experience (not unlike Lehmann's notion of the audience as the meaning-maker). In this way, the

spectator becomes a witness.

Ridout points out that 'the misappropriation of Levinas' thesis from theatre and performance in the twentieth century can be seen as a lazy form of mundane liberalism, in which we are wearily enjoined to be nice to each other, and is thus of no use to anyone' (2009:55). However, he appreciates that the thinking on the ethical encounter makes us consider what it means to be present, to participate – in both theatre and in politics – or to accept an ethical responsibility for the other (ibid.:64). What Ridout sees as problematic is that

> We may value such work for its ethical contribution because we recognize what the contribution might be. We can name it and understand it. We might be said to identify with it, with something in it that we recognize as our own […] Perhaps we are responding not to the 'other' in such work but to 'the same', to a reflection of our own 'self'. If that is the case, perhaps the work (of which we are part) fails to make any 'contribution' to an 'ethical life'.
>
> (ibid.:66)

In his opinion, it is Plato's demand that theatre needs to justify itself in terms of its contribution to an ethical life that might stand in the way of achieving it. Thus, 'the work that would provoke a truly ethical response, in Levinas' terms, would be that work which appeared, at least, to have no ethical ambition whatsoever' (Ridout, 2009:67). Ridout goes on to speak of a show (*Pezzo O (due)* by Maria Donata D'Urso) which, in its dealing with what it is to be or have a human body, with which one does things, contains 'no proposition about the nature of the world, offers no narrative or dramatic encounter or anything that might solicit from an audience an ethical response' (ibid.:68), and thus avoids making any overt ethical claim, allowing the spectator to 'consider what it is that allows him or her to recognize another as a fellow human' (ibid.:69).

But, clearly, Ridout is also considering and appreciating the piece he is writing about in terms of its ethical contribution: his suggestion, in the end, is not that we should skip Plato's

requirement altogether and be done with ethical considerations, but that the work should not offer ethical propositions of any kind but should instead present itself like a canvas on which we can project our own, and discuss accordingly its contribution and value as spectators – or as witnesses (or from the superior position of theory). Besides, even if a work appears as if it contains no proposition or seeks no ethical response whatsoever from the audience, it doesn't mean that it is not already regulated by its creator in certain ways, however disguised these may be, in order to ensure that there will be a response, without the work ever taking responsibility for it. What Ridout sees in the specific piece, then, could very well be what the work itself meant him to see all along, without him knowing.

What I argue for is a rethinking of the relationship with the work through a notion of friendship as set forth by Alexander Nehamas, but one that is non-embodied and exhibits itself in the public realm: a relationship that allows us to enjoy both the work's moral and non-moral values, simply because we don't need to justify the work's contribution in ethical terms in order to connect with it. This sort of relationship with the work rinses off the question of ethics, also by rejecting the impersonal face of the encounter, the Other, and takes place as a personal bond, as an irreducible experience, as a sense of affinity and attraction towards the work for itself, and for what we may become, by being with it, in the future.

In the third chapter of this thesis, when discussing postmodernist narratives and the claim they make of challenging our established notions of reality and liberating us from the limitations of our model of logic in order to help us understand the world, and ourselves, in new, radical ways, I concluded that these narratives are in fact already conventionalized, since they also function as ways to regulate audience emotion, and are thus unable to propose new thinking; but I left, however, the question of the new dramatic play unanswered. I return to it: what I think the new dramatic play does is that it unsettles the logic of the ethical contribution, by putting forward a gesture of friendship – a gesture that originates and belongs to the text itself. This gesture of the new dramatic text, which has to do with the non-regulation of our relationship with it, is, I think, a radical act. And that's why the new dramatic

play comes with real risk (but also some genuine hope).

In the course of this thesis, I engaged with plays such as

Tim Crouch's *The Author*, which, on a first level, extends an invitation that is fundamentally political: it involves the creation of a dialogical space for us to explore what we are as an audience, and how we can make meaning. But early on this possibility is shut down by the play's explicit agenda, for it aims to be 'a rallying cry to stop the thoughtless representation of abuse' (Crouch, 2011b:418), and anticipates the outcome of its contribution, having incorporated in the text the expected experience of the audience. The clash, however, between the original promise of the play, as also represented by the architecture of the space in which it is set (the two bunks of seating facing each other), which implies a place of politics, and the attempt to regulate the spectators' responses, brings chaos, as the spectators rebel against it and, ultimately, un-regulate it. It is possible, I think, that *The Author* ends up being a new dramatic play by pure accident.

And there is Heiner Müller's *Germania 3.* In it, one will find no representations of friendship. Rather, the text presents itself as a slaughter house: language, forms, history, literature and culture, everything is chopped, smashed and used to feed the machine and keep it going – even the writer himself, his life, his illness, his anger, his desperation, his loneliness, his forthcoming death. It all becomes fuel for the text-machine. *Germania 3* is blood-stained: a composition of war in which stealing texts and setting them each against the other, to devour one another, is the reflection of a world in which killing and cannibalism are how things are done. This is a text that doesn't pretend to be innocent. It presents the continuous death of language and humanity, and speaks of the end of hope.

Or, perhaps, it doesn't speak at all. It refuses to speak. It stays emphatically silent. Its plurality is advocating the annihilation of self. It offers no exit doors. It bombards the audience with hate speeches and images of extreme violence; it stones them with endless references, more than anyone could cope with. It is sarcastic. It couldn't care less about making us better people. How can a text like this be understood? How can it be put on the stage? It poses itself as a problem for both the stage and the audience. It is difficult, it plays with riddles, it complicates things. It is disobedient and resists being regulated. It is inexhaustible. It cannot be consumed. It mocks the question of ethics. Its tragic predicament is not ethical but existential. It doesn't claim that it can save a single life. On the contrary, being with it one runs the risk of being trapped and devoured by the machine as well. Whatever happens, it is up to the spectator to recognize the play's gesture, and take up responsibility.

Sometime after I wrote *Lucas and Time*,

perhaps a year later, I imagined it staged in a house with many rooms: the guests arrive in the evening, it could be seven or eight, or nine pm. They enter into a huge reception room. There is food and wine. There is a fireplace. Someone is playing the piano. There is beautiful furniture made of wood. There are books. There is, perhaps, the steady sound of rain coming from outside. This is the world of SEVEN; fragments of the text are delivered by recorded voices, playing on a loop. Then – it could be hours later – the guests visit the rooms upstairs. Some of them are dark; some seem not to have been used for a long time, with a few, forgotten objects (a chessboard perhaps among them) lying on the floor, or piled in the corners of the room, covered in dust. In some rooms, the various parts of the play take place. The last room is completely empty. The guests enter (perhaps they are a bit startled by the emptiness, perhaps not). Again, the recorded voices, mixed with the sound of the clinking of glasses, music, laughter. The voices wonder about the absent host, engage in word games, list the pieces of furniture one by one, the titles of the paintings on the walls, the name of the authors on the bookshelves, the colours, the textiles. It is perhaps six am. What follows the sound of the rain on the window glass is silence.

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